



Discernment-Part 1
Curiosity & Real Conversions
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Well, I remember it like it was yesterday. I was a new pastor. I was young. I had a meeting with this guy—important guy I didn't know very well, twice my age. I met him at the restaurant and before I settled into the booth there I excused myself to wash up.

So I'm walking to the restroom thinking about how to bring up the important subject I needed to talk about with this man, and rehearsing a few lines in my head. I stepped in, began to wash my hands there at the sink, thinking through things, and all of a sudden the door opens and there's this woman walking in. And I looked at her with a kind of smirk in my eye like, "You silly, foolish woman. You pay attention, you know?"

Well, her eyes got really big with embarrassment. With a partially open door—I remember looking at the door, looking at me, looking again at the door, looking at me—her embarrassment kind of morphed into contempt at that point. And she began to look at me with that look, "You silly, foolish man. You start paying attention."

And again, as a new pastor, I was immediately embarrassed and my eyes got really big. I was picturing the headlines in our local paper: "New Pastor Arrested in Women's Restroom." You know, I was petrified.

Ever since, I've been real good about checking carefully the door to the restrooms in these restaurants—which, by the way, I don't like it when they get cute with you and start putting that in foreign languages and stuff. It's not helpful. You know, "caballeros." I see "men" and "women"—that's super helpful. Because you want to get the doors right.

Reminds me of some of the other things that easily get mixed up. I was in downtown L.A. recently in the middle of a busy traffic day, and there are some spots there where the freeways all come together, all the ramps are looking the same. You take the wrong ramp in traffic and you can be in trouble, take you way out of your way and mess your schedule.

It reminded me of being in Chicago for those years and getting on the wrong subway train. That can have serious consequences there in Chicago.



Speaking of travel, I can remember being on a business trip, opening up my luggage and having packed my son's shirts in my luggage—which may be fine in your family, but they're not interchangeable sizes at my house.

Speaking of trips like that, there was one recently this year. I remember going with those silly little magnetic card keys you've got and just—you know they don't work half the time, and "don't put them next to your credit card," all that. I'm sitting there trying about eight, nine times, rattling the door. And then you look up and you realize, "I'm trying to get in the wrong hotel room."

Or standing by the wrong car with your hand on the door wondering why your remote won't open it up. Don't look at me like this hasn't happened to you—you've done this, right?

I know we've all done this when you reach over to turn on the light over the kitchen sink only to grind up your spoon in the garbage disposal. They ought to make that switch red or something. When I'm still in my own house—for years now—I still get that wrong.

Well, discernment, distinguishing, differentiation—you know, all of that is really important in everyday life. Obviously, sometimes when you don't have that ability to distinguish things and differentiate, the results can be humorous and funny. Other times it can be serious and there can be serious consequences, and sometimes tragic. You read in the paper every day some of these stories—really, they come down to people not being able to distinguish very important things they need to differentiate, and without that discernment, it can be costly.

But when Jesus chose his disciples, one of the things he was concerned about is creating and cultivating and developing these men that would be discerning men. I mean, it's a real large facet of wisdom to be discerning—to be able to distinguish things that a lot of people may miss. And we see that in the ministry of Christ.

Interesting—as we get to the fifth chapter here of the Gospel of Luke, which we've been studying verse by verse and passage by passage—we get to Luke chapter 5, and we see here from the very beginning of that, the first eleven verses are all about the calling of the disciples, at least a few of them there in this group, and Peter is the prominent figure in that scene. And then you see in the middle of chapter 6, you see him appoint twelve of those disciples as his apostles.



As I studied that repeatedly and looked at that transformation of these disciples turning into apostles, I looked at the way Luke laid that out. You can kind of see six distinctive scenes between the calling of the disciples and the appointment of those disciples as apostles. And so many of those scenes, I recognized, were wonderful lessons of Christ doing things that would show and train and teach that idea of wisdom and discernment and differentiation.

I thought that would be a great way for us to study these next eight scenes in the Gospel of Luke—this narrative that is broken down, starting with the call of the disciples and ending, within this series, the appointment of the apostles. That would help us now if we just thought in those terms. Obviously, there's a lot to learn in this section of Luke, but this can be helpful. I've called this "discernment," right? The training—the wisdom and the training—that Christ gives to his disciples who would become his apostles.

Now, looking at both scenes on the ends of this—the appointment of the apostles and the calling of the disciples—I want to take those and see what we can discern from them as well. How do we learn some distinctions, which often is missed, I think, in this first section?

If you haven't opened your Bibles yet, look at this in chapter 5, verses 1–11, and see if the first distinction we make perhaps isn't the most important one of the whole series. That is the distinction that can be seen—granted, with a larger context in view—between the crowds that press in to see Christ, which we follow throughout the Gospel of Luke (and we see in the other gospels as well—we're, you know, a pretty fickle brand of people), to the calling of Peter in a way that is profound and different. Something transforms in who he is. I've called this message, you know, "discernment," obviously, and the subtitle: distinguishing between curiosity about Christ and real conversion to Christ.

That distinction, I think, is a great place to start. In a day that doesn't like to be discerning and distinguishing and differentiating, that's almost offensive—because if we just all say we're kind of on the same team, that ought to be good enough. But of course the Bible knows there's much more at stake, particularly when it comes to the difference between being curious about Christ and being truly converted to Christ. If there's ever a distinction we've got to make, it ought to be that one.

So let's look at this text and see what we can learn about this topic this morning. Beginning in verse number 1—we'll read the whole scene here, verses 1–11—and then dive in to the difference we see in Peter's life from the fickle crowds that we learn so much about in the Gospel of Luke.



Verse 1: On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him—that is, Christ, obviously—to hear the Word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. (That’s one of the many names that’s given to the Sea of Tiberias or the Sea of Galilee.) And he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and they were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon’s—of course, that’s Peter; we know him by Peter—he asked him to put out a little from the land. And if you know how lakes are, and certainly if you’ve been to the Sea of Galilee, like any lake, you’ve got these natural little alcoves as the zigzagging shoreline of the lake is. So he comes out a ways on the boat, gets into that boat, and he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

Now this is, by the way, the creator of all the physics of acoustics and the principles of how sound waves work. This is the perfect setting for him to be able to speak even at a low tone with his voice and be able to speak in a little alcove with water in front of him to hundreds and hundreds of people without any trouble hearing him. And that’s what he does. So that’s the scene—that’s the setting.

And when he had finished speaking, he says to Simon (verse 4), “Now, let’s go—let’s put out into the deep. Let’s go out to the middle of the lake; let’s put down your nets for a catch.”

Now remember, this was his job—he was a professional fisherman. And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing.” Not a good time to try and catch fish. “But at your word I will let down the nets.” And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking. It was so big it was breaking their nets. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and they filled both the boats so that they began to sink.

Now when Simon Peter saw it—and here’s a very weird, almost counterintuitive response—he falls down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. (We assume that Andrew was a part of this as well, Peter’s brother.) And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to the land, they left everything and followed him.

Now, the distinction that I’m trying to make this morning and point out is one that’ll take a little bit of context. Because if you look at verse number 1—just take the first three verses here—Jesus seeming to have a successful preaching event with the people who were so eager to hear him, they were (verse 1) pressing in on him to hear the Word of God. I mean, it looks like they’re coming: they don’t want to be entertained, they don’t want to see a sideshow. As opposed to other settings where we see people coming seemingly with all the wrong motives, this seems to be the right motive—we want to hear the Word of God. And they’re pressing in to hear it, so much so that he



has to put out a little ways in Simon's borrowed boat and use it as a platform so he can speak to them all, so that they can all hear him.

Now, what could possibly be wrong with that? Well, if you study the Word—even if you just take your concordance, your Bible software, and type in "crowds"—and you watch throughout the Gospels how the crowds may press in to hear him, to hear the Word of God at one moment, it doesn't take much for those crowds to say, "Had enough."

One of the classic passages on this that would be worth looking at this morning is in John chapter 6. So keep your finger here in Luke 5 and go over to John 6, and watch how fickle the crowds are.

The crowds that hear him speaking now in his Bread of Life discourse—after feeding the people and all of that—he starts to analogize his life to bread: "I'm the staple. I'm the thing that will not only nourish you, but the thing that you need for sustenance in your life." He starts wording some things in this illustration that are tough to even mentally process. What does he mean by that? "What are you getting at?" Hard for them to process—not to mention the application of what he was saying that was almost, you know, just so grandiose and seemingly egocentric, like, "You're the indispensable thing in our lives?" It was tough.

Drop all the way to number 60 and look at their response.

John 6:60: When many of his—now here's a good word for us to underline—*disciples* heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"

Now, here's the problem with teaching the Bible in a modern setting: we've kind of tied our own definitions to some of these Bible words. Words like *disciple*. I know how modern Christians like to see the word *disciple*. They see it as kind of, you know, "Christian 2.0." It's when you really move on to being super-serious about your faith and you start reading the Bible every day and maybe talking to others about it. "There's the disciple," right? That's the real—that's the varsity Christianity and the rest of us are just sophomore Christians until we really get serious and committed and we rededicate ourselves.

That's nonsense. That's certainly not the way the Bible defines the word. As a matter of fact, as you underline the word, it may be good somewhere in your Bible or in your notes to make clear that all this really means—and the way that it's used throughout the Gospels—is simply someone who sits



and learns from Christ. Someone who is a learner. Literally, the Greek word, if it's transliterated, you would see it comes into English into our word *mathematics*. There's one thing you have to do if you learn mathematics: you have to sit down and you have to study. And that's the idea—the rabbi, the teacher, had his disciples, people that sat there and learned from him.

Now, there are a lot of people that learn from him that have a variety of levels of commitment or devotion to him, as he points out in this text. Here's the group of learners—congregants, if you will—who are attracted and interested in what he had to say. And now they're going, "Wow, we're getting to the hard stuff now." That's pretty tough—maybe hard to understand intellectually, hard to apply in terms of you being the everything to us.

Verse 61: Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this—now, this is not the Twelve; this is everybody, the crowds—said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"

Now, this is interesting. In verse 62 you see a pastoral strategy you don't find much in the 21st century. When pastors today find that they're starting to offend people, they back off and figure, "We can come up with something else that won't offend them." Jesus has the opposite approach in verse 62. He's like, "You're offended by that? You ain't heard nothing yet. Let me tell you about the Son of Man." That's where Jesus goes.

He says, "Then what if you were to see the Son of Man"—which, remember, if you've been long enough in the Gospel of Luke with me, I hope you know that's the phrase from Daniel, wherein Daniel the one who is the Messiah has been granted all authority over the kingdom of earth from the Father. This is a big phrase—one of Jesus' favorite phrases for himself—"the Son of Man ascending to where he was before." If you could see something of my glory and power, you wouldn't be choking on the fact that I'm the Bread of Life. You would see that this is obvious: I should be your everything because I am the Son of Man. If you could just see that—well, you would be offended even more, even stumble over that.

Here's the problem (v. 63): "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no help." And that's a loaded statement. But the idea is: if you're just trying to process this and reason your way through it like mere humans would, you don't get it. The Spirit of God has to be involved in this. He's the one who not only allows the understanding—or the illumination—of these statements, but allows you to incorporate these and adopt them and accept them and apply them. "The words I've spoken to you—they are spirit and life. These are things that will change you."



“But there are some of you”—now remember, the pronoun here is pointing back to what they’ve already been described as: learners, disciples—“some of you disciples who do not believe.” Look at that. Think about that. In the crowd of learners there’s some among you—you don’t trust.

Now, the word I know we’ve talked a lot about—the word that’s translated *believe*—it’s more than just mental assent. This is a sense of *trust*. “There are some of you here,” he says in the crowd, “you’re not really with me. You don’t trust in me.”

Not only that—he says in the parenthetical statement here—for Jesus knew from the beginning those who would not believe in the crowds and who it was who would betray him. There was even one on the team here—the apostolic staff, if you will—and you know who he was.

Verse 65: And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” There’s something transcendent about what’s happening here. This is not just you getting it, learning it, and saying, “Oh, I’m gonna do that.” God has to be involved in this.

Verse 66: After this, many of his *disciples*—there’s our word again—turned back and no longer walked with him. Like a lot of folks who hear, interested, they like it, it’s all appealing to them—but at some point it gets a little too hard, a little too invasive; it cramps my style a little too much, and they’re done. They walk away. And as John said later in his epistle in 1 John 2, he said, “They went out from us, because they were not really of us. If they would have been of us, they would have remained with us. But the going showed they were never really of us.” That’s the picture here. People—they’ve had enough.

As Jesus said in his parable of the soils, there are some soils—they immediately respond with enthusiasm. But in time, all these things get hard: persecution because of the word, worries about the world and the priorities of life—they fall away and have no more interest.

Jesus said to the Twelve, “Hey, how about you guys—the staff here—do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed”—they may not, but we have—“and we’ve come to know”—talking about the Son of Man—“we know you are the Holy One of God. We would not stumble over that fact if we were to see you ascending back to the Father. We’re in with you, Jesus.”



And Jesus said (v. 70), “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you—even on the staff—one of you is a *diabolos*, an adversary. You’re not really with us, you’re not really for me; you’re a devil.” And he spoke, of course, of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he—one of the Twelve—was going to betray him.

What’s interesting here is even among the disciples—the Twelve who would become apostles—there were some that just did not have their heart in the right place because the Spirit had not granted it, the Father had not granted it. The power of God working within the message—it just wasn’t clicking. They were interested; they might even—as the crowd did here—press in to hear more of the word, but they weren’t truly converted.

Number one on your outline, let’s put it this way: if you’re taking notes, *we need to move beyond interest and attraction*. Let me move this from the first century to the 21st century. There are some of you sitting here in this auditorium right now, and you’re interested in Christ. You’re even attracted to Christianity. You think, “Well, this makes sense to me. I like it. It’s starting to grow on me. I get stuff out of the sermons, and I’m even starting to kind of emotionally connect when we sing those songs. And I like it all. And I’m in.”

See, that’s the problem. The discernment that we need is to recognize that just being interested or attracted to Christ or Christianity—that’s not Christianity. That’s not real Christianity. That’s not conversion to Christ. There are a lot of people that are interested and attracted to Christ. They’ll prove it by their attendance at preaching. They’ll prove it even by their involvement in things that make them feel something in relation to God. But they’re not real Christians. They’re different than the Peter that we’re about to see who has changed in his heart from the inside out.

I know we quote it from time to time, and I hope you know it’s because of love and concern for you. But the Bible is so clear that many will come to Christ on that day in Matthew 7 and say, “Lord, Lord,” and he’ll say, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” That’s the thumbnail of one of the scariest passages—I often say the scariest passage—in all the Bible. People that assumed because they were pro-Jesus and not anti-Jesus, “Surely I’m okay with God.”

As a matter of fact, a lot of people will respond negatively this weekend to this sermon because—again—Pastor Mike’s getting up, making us question whether or not we’re real Christians. “I’m pro-Jesus. I’m for him.”

See, if I love you and I care about you, and I care about what the Bible says regarding your relationship to Christ, I would make it very clear that you’ve got to move beyond being interested in



Christ and attracted to Christianity and the truth of Christianity. There needs to be a conversion in your life—the kind that the Bible talks about. We need to recognize there's a difference in just saying, "I want to be a part of it," and really being changed by the Spirit of God.

Give you a couple examples—and we'll only just briefly spend time in these texts. But turn over back to Luke and go to chapter 9 with me real fast. You want to see examples of people that were pro-Jesus but not Christians? Here are three great examples. We'll get to this in detail. I can prove all the quick propositional statements I'll make about this text later when we get there, Lord willing, in Luke 9—if we all live that long.

Look at verse 57, the last six verses of this chapter. They're not anti-Jesus. Matter of fact, they're pro-Jesus. Most people would be very happy to have these people in their church.

Luke 9:57: As they were going along the road, someone stepped up and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." You want to talk about interest and attraction to Christ? "I'm in," they say. "I'm in."

Jesus' response here, though, isn't to throw his arm around him, give him some verses on assurance, and say, "Fantastic, we have another convert here." He looks through his words—now, only Christ can do this, I understand. I mean, we have to take people at their word, I realize that—but Christ looks beyond the words of devotion to him, and he says, "Listen, there's something obviously that's a little stricter—an addendum on your statement. You've got limits to what you mean by that. 'I'll follow you as long as...' and 'I'll follow you to the extent that...' I mean, there's something else here."

Because Jesus responds with a very specific concern that wasn't a concern to Christ and the Twelve, but it was a concern to this guy. Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. I have no home right now as an itinerant rabbi. You realize that, huh?" Okay. Well, we don't hear what happens to this guy, but Jesus wouldn't waste words on this man—much like he did with the rich young ruler. He knew what the idols of his heart were that he wasn't willing to give up. And we get the idea here—and because there's a triad of stories, we understand—they all seem to fit together.

Because the next guy (v. 59), Jesus comes in and says, "Follow me." And he says, "Lord, I will"—I mean, this is a positive response—"but let me first go and bury my father." Now that sounds totally reasonable. Your dad's aging and he's going to die, or either he's dead and I've got to bury him. "I mean, we've got stuff to do here domestically."



Jesus responds in verse 60—something very unusual here: “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Wow. Jesus is really going to give me an assignment to do evangelism and I’m not going to make my dad’s funeral? Is that really what’s going on in this text?

Is that what he’s going to ask me to do? I don’t know what he’s going to ask you to do—but that’s the point. We’re trying to reveal the kind of supremacy in the relationship where Christ is the Lord and we are his servants, to where when he asks us to do anything, we’re willing to say, “Okay.” Apparently, this guy said, “I’ll follow you, but I’ve got issues. I’ve got some things and agendas that cannot be messed with. You can’t somehow undercut my commitment to my family.”

Verse 61: Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but I have a little thing here, too—and it’s not going to take long, and maybe if you’re talking about an aging parent in the other text, I don’t have that. I just need to say goodbye to people at home, because I need them to understand what I’m doing here, and I need that kind of going-away party.”

Jesus said, “Listen, no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” I’m not talking about Christianity 2.0 here. We’re talking about people that are going to enter the kingdom of God. And apparently there’s something about this that needs to be different than people saying, “I’m in—but only so far. I’ll do it—as long as it doesn’t make me do that. As long as it doesn’t call for me giving up this.”

We need to rethink what Jesus is looking for here.

Before you think, “That’s so extreme”—I know it sounds extreme; it does. And it sounds severe, and it sounds unloving for him to say those things. But it’s the same kind of rules that you live by in your life. In certain relationships—it’s the rules you live by. I assure you, you’ve been here before.

Let’s put it in terms of love—love relationship. When Jesus was asked, “What’s the most important commandment?” what did he say? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.” Does that sound supreme, superlative, over-the-top? Well, it’s all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.



There are love relationships on earth where you look at that and you say, “This is going to be my supreme love” called marriage. Here’s my supreme relationship and commitment. When you have that in your life, there’s a certain kind of other exclusion that you have to people that aren’t willing to reciprocate a kind of supremacy.

In other words, you would train your children not to accept just any old proposal for marriage, I would hope—and you didn’t either. You didn’t say, “Well, as long as you’re interested in me and attracted to me, let’s get married.” That would be foolish. I mean, there’s a certain criteria in terms of what this relationship means. And by definition this kind of relationship requires a kind of priority, a kind of supremacy, even a kind of exclusion of other things.

One more passage on this before we leave this illustration—in Luke chapter 14, which for some people is the most difficult passage regarding salvation for them to swallow. Turn there with me. Here’s a passage that I think, if you looked at it through the lens of what I’ve just begun to illustrate—that in marriage you have the same kind of concern that Christ has for us—while you’re turning to Luke 14, let me suggest this mind-blowing thing.

It’s not as though God came along and said, “Well, you guys have that marriage thing. Let me explain to you what the relationship with God is like—it’s like a marriage, since you’re all acquainted with that.” That’s not how it works. Here’s how I think we ought to think of it: the God of the universe, who could have arranged things on planet earth any way he wanted—here’s a God who, knowing what relationship with human beings is supposed to be like, creates something called marriage and allows us to participate in it and live in a society that has it so that we know something of what it means to relate to the living God.

Made us think we need to get things in order here. God gave us marriage to give us a picture of what it means to be committed and devoted and in a covenant relationship with someone. Now, that’s all, you know, a horizontal relationship—laterally here on earth—but it pictures this vertical relationship I have with God.

Drop down to verse 25—Luke 14. Is that where you’re at?

Verse 25: Speaking of the crowds—crowds get really big; “great crowds,” Luke describes it—accompanied him. And he turned to them and said, “Oh, praise the Lord. Let me call other people and tell them how big our church has gotten.” Is that what he says? No. Counterintuitive. You know sometimes we see this in the Scripture—we call it “Operation Crowd Reduction.” When we see the



big crowds coming, we start to think, “Maybe you don’t understand what Christianity is all about, because this is not as appealing to the average person in the crowd as you seem to think it is.”

So he says, “Do you even understand what you’re signing up for? If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

Now, think that one through. He doesn’t want us to love our mother and father, our brothers? I mean, isn’t the assumption about loving our neighbor based on how we love ourselves? This doesn’t seem to make any sense.

See, as severe as that sounds, isn’t that exactly what you’re looking for, ladies—let’s just start with you—when a man comes and proposes to be your husband? I mean, aren’t you wanting him to be willing to have other girls think that he *hates* them, if need be, because *you* are the supreme love now in his life? That’s how it works. “Oh, but my old girlfriends—well, they might think that I hate them if I marry you.” Oh, well—that’s the point. The point is a kind of exclusive, covenant love that makes this human relationship the supreme love of your life. If it damages your other relationships with your other girls—oh, no big deal. That’s the point.

Now, do you want to marry a husband who’s hateful toward people? Of course not. That’s not the point. Nor is that the point here. But that may be the effect in some girl that says, “Oh, he doesn’t love me.” Well, I guess not—the way I love my wife, I don’t. And that’s the point. Jesus is looking for supreme, prioritized love. That’s what Christianity is all about.

Next passage (v. 27): “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” You mean there’s pain involved and sacrifice involved in this? Huh. Yeah.

“It’s like building a tower.” I mean, you’re not going to build it without sitting down first and counting the cost—great line—“whether he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

Now, think about that. Wow—Christ wants me to sit down and count the cost. Don’t you want the guy that proposes to you to count the cost and think this through? Nothing weird about that. This is what marriage is all about—this supreme relationship. You better understand it’s going to cost you.



Your daily schedule as a bachelor is not going to be the same anymore. There are sacrifices to make. Is marriage a bad thing? It's a great thing. But it certainly is going to do something to other relationships in your life. And you're going to have to sit down and figure out what's involved in this before you ever sign up. Don't throw a ring at me unless you're ready to understand what the commitment involves. Normal—you live by the same rules.

Verse 31: “Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not first sit down and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not”—and those are bad odds in a war—“while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

Now think about that. When do you ask for terms of peace? When an encroaching army has more people than you and can kill you—you say, “I don't want to fight.” That means he becomes conqueror, you become subservient—you *surrender*. That's what it means.

That's why he says in the next verse: “So therefore any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” I can't come to a marriage and say, “Oh honey, I want to marry—but all my—this is my stuff, not yours.” No, no, that's not it. I'm renouncing all that I have to this relationship. Matter of fact, in the old Common Book of Prayer—it still makes its way into most marriage ceremonies today—there's that concept of this relationship: “forsaking all others.” What does that mean? Sounds so severe. No—it's just the profundity of the relationship.

So you look at a text like this that most people say, “That can't be real Christianity.” It is. It's the fundamental basics of real Christianity. It's the same kind of relationship that people in their twenties get into—recognizing what it means to change the fabric of other relationships, count the cost, and renounce things in terms of personal, individual “this is mine; it's not yours; this is mine; you can't have a part of it.” And all the other things in life I leave behind as a bachelor. That's what Christianity is all about.

You've got to move beyond interest and attraction. As we put it around here sometimes, some of you are busy right here in this auditorium *dating Christ*. You've said, “Well, I've had prayers answered. I feel good when I worship. I really like the sermons—they make sense to me; I take notes; I'm into this.” That does not mean you're a Christian.

Have you had that point in your life where you've gone from dating—if you will—to marriage? Where there's that real understanding of putting it all out there and saying, “Okay, God. I understand: you're God; I'm the servant. I'm ready to step into this. My identity now is in you.”



That's a whole different kind of arrangement. It's a kind of faith and repentance we try to illustrate—as Christ did—in multiple ways to get the point that it's more than checking a box that you believe in Christ and you want to be pro-Jesus.

Now again, this whole series is about discernment. And at times you're going to feel it's countercultural—because who really wants to make that distinction in our day, where if you see someone cheering for the right team, they're "one of us"? "I'm pro-Jesus; I'm not anti-Jesus." There's a distinction here that if you don't make it could cost you your eternity. That's why Jesus said things like, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,'" and he'll say, "I never knew you." You thought you had a relationship, and we didn't have a relationship.

How important is it for us to be discerning as it relates to what it means to be a Christian? It's certainly more than being interested in Christ and attracted to Christianity.

Number two (verses 4–8 in Luke 5): Peter now—called out from the crowd—not saying everybody in the crowd was a flake, but clearly we learn a lot of flakes are in the crowd as we study the Gospels. Peter, though, we learn becomes a real follower of Christ. And with all of his foibles and all of his failure and all of his stumbling, he's a genuinely converted individual, devoted to Jesus Christ.

Let's start—verse 4: He had finished speaking. He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep; let your nets down for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing."

Now, I'm not a fisherman. I don't pretend to be a fisherman. I don't like fishing. I don't understand fishing. I don't eat fish. You can have it. Did I offend you? But the fishermen tell me—certainly when I go to Israel, and I go to the Sea of Galilee—that really the best fishing is nighttime fishing. That's when it works there at least. Whatever—it works here; I don't need to know—don't email me, I don't care.

But here's the deal: these guys had already done their night fishing, and they got skunked—nothing. Terrible night for fishing. "We took nothing. But you know what? We understand who you are. We recognize your authority. We realize you're the Messiah. Hey, if you want to go fishing right now, let's go. But at your word I'll let down the nets."



And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat, “Come and help!” They filled both boats up—so much so that they began to sink.

And Simon Peter saw it. He pulled up his hand, he high-fived Christ. He said, “Praise the Lord! I got a new fishing partner! We’re going to make a load of money doing this.” It’s what you would want to say if you’re a commercial fisherman. You get skunked all night, you get a guy in a boat who says, “Let’s go now,” and the boats are filled—I’m going, I see dollar signs in the eyes of the fishermen, right? This is great—praise the Lord! Benefits to being associated with the Messiah!

Not what Peter does. Weird, counterintuitive response—huh? He falls at the knees of Christ and he says—not “Let’s become business partners”—he says, “Depart from me. Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken—so were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. We assume Andrew was a part of this as well—Peter’s brother.

That was a big catch. And it did something that you might not expect to Peter, because what Peter was recognizing in this text was something that so changed his view of Christ and him that that response makes sense in the larger context of what the Bible says when people get turned in their heart to God. It’s a normal response.

I don’t want to take too much from the words in this text that may or may not be strongly trying to suggest this, but there are a couple things in the passage that, I think, hint at the kind of transformation that’s taking place in Peter’s life.

For instance, we keep calling him “Peter,” but what’s his name here? *Simon*. Simon is his pre-conversion name. If you’ll see it beginning in verse—what, three or two?—verse 3: he gets in a boat; one of them was Simon’s. Verse 4: he says to Simon. Verse 5: Simon answered. We don’t get his post-conversion name, which he’s going to get later, until verse 8—when here he says—Luke says—“Simon Peter” saw it and fell down at his knees. Even like a foretaste, you know, a revealing of something future for him. I mean, it’d be convincing.

But there’s another change in vocabulary that’s harder to see in our English texts. Circle the word in verse 5 when Simon answers with a word that starts with an *M*—“Master.” *Master*—circle that word. And then circle the last word of verse 8—“Lord.”



Those are two different words—two different words in English, obviously—and two different words in the Greek language. Now, the one that he ends with in saying, “Depart from me, I’m a sinful man, O Lord,” is the word that we find most frequently used when we’re referring to God. Now, I understand—if you’ve studied the Bible extensively—you know that word (*kurios*) is also used as a respectful term: “lord” or “sir,” you know, as one would say “lord” in the medieval times—“sir.” It’s reverential. But most of the time this is a word that speaks of something much more weighty, something much more important. When they translate the Old Testament text or quote the Old Testament, the words that are translated for God’s proper name (*Yahweh*) is taken into the Greek New Testament with this word *kurios*—“Lord.” Now I know it has a broader meaning in some contexts, but most of the time this is a weighty word to talk about “Lord—Lord God.”

The word *Master* there is one we don’t frequently see in the New Testament, but it’s a normal word of respect: “chief,” “boss.” And it’s not like “Hey, chief, you want me to go out?” I mean, it’s not disrespectful—it’s respectful. But it’s the idea of master, of a boss, of chief, of the one in charge.

The shift in the vocabulary from calling him *Master* to *Lord*—those may seem like equal words in our mind, but really there’s a lesser-and-greater comparison going on here. All that to say, when Peter encounters this exercise of the authority of Christ to take little-brained fish and direct them at will—as Psalm 8 says the Lord can do, he’s the King of it all—direct them into the nets with a word, he stands back and says, “I’m sinful.” He stands in awe—he’s astonished.

Two things here—**Number two** on your outline: when it comes to moving beyond interest and attraction, what we need to move to is *standing in awe* and being *humble*. Standing in awe of Christ. Any Christian who has a real biblical testimony has that moment when Christ becomes much more in their thinking than he’s ever been—and that humbles you. Peter’s response of being a sinner all of a sudden—which he always was—but now that recognition of it is against the backdrop of this clear demonstration of the Lordship of Christ.

A couple things that may help in this regard—turn, if you would, to Hebrews chapter 12.

Every conversion to Christ—regardless of the doctrinal disputes on this topic—every conversion to Christ leads people to consider the authority or the Lordship of Christ. You really can’t get there without it. There is something about being, by the Spirit of God, drawn and granted eternal life—drawn to Christ and granted eternal life—that gives you this sense of smallness, which comes from understanding something of the bigness of the Triune God.



When I thought about this topic, and I thought about the awe and the astonishment and why he would be so, you know, retracted into his own sinfulness, I thought: “Well, the bigness of God—I could look anywhere for that.” And when people get right with the living God they always have this sense of fear of God. It’s the beginning of knowledge; it’s the beginning of wisdom, as Proverbs says.

And I thought, if I took you to the Old Testament, some of you would roll your eyes and cross your arms and say, “There he goes again—he’s quoting the Old Testament. We all know God was much angrier and terrified and had, I don’t know, ulcers or something in the Old Testament—he’s always mad, breathing fire and snorting and killing people. New Testament—took a nap for 4,000 years, he comes back, he’s feeling so good and lovely, and he’s kind and generous, and he has all these people climbing up in his lap like grandpa on rocks, and he’s just so much happier now than he was then. And so don’t go quoting fear-of-God verses to me if you’re going to be on the left side of the Bible because that’s not how it is now.”

Okay, maybe you wouldn’t have said it all like that, but some of you think that’s how it works—the “God of the Old Testament,” you call him. Let me tell you this: when it comes to our response to seeing the greatness of God that would lead us to awe and fear and dread before the God of the Bible, it should be *more intense* in the New Testament than it is in the Old Testament. That’s the argument being made in Hebrews 12.

Take a look at it—drop all the way down to verse 21. And as you get there, just a few verses before verse 21, slow your eyes down and start to see the context of what we’re talking about: Mount Sinai—the coming of God, the voice of God, the law of God coming to Moses. Mount Sinai is now going to be contrasted with Mount Zion. The picture is Old Covenant/New Covenant—old arrangement of the Old Testament, the truth and the grace and salvation of the New Testament.

Now look—this is going to be an argument not from greater dread to lesser dread, and greater fear to lesser fear—greater-to-lesser. It’s going to be just the opposite: an argument from *lesser to greater*.

Verse 21: “Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’ But you”—this is obviously a contrast—“have come to Mount Zion,” not Mount Sinai. And most of us are wiping our brow, going, “Whew, I’m glad,” because that sounds terrifying—if the prophet himself is freaked out, I’m glad I’m at Mount Zion because it’s a much nicer resort mountain than Mount Sinai.



That's not the argument. "To the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

"See that you do not refuse him who is speaking." Talking present-tense now. "For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth"—now here's the argument from lesser to greater—"much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." Which is more foreboding—warning from earth, or warning from heaven? The point here being made is this is even *more* dreadful.

Verse 26: "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.'" This phrase—"yet once more"—indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made, all of creation—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship"—not the high-five, "Can't wait to see Jesus because we're going to dance a jig—he's my peeps, he's the Man upstairs, my homeboy." That's not it. This is a God we worship "with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

The picture of the fear of seeing God for who he is—and in turn watching ourselves in contrition by response to that God—that picture of greatness and dread, that picture of authority and contrition, that picture of the power of God and our repentance—that's bigger now, according to Hebrews 12, than it was in the Old Testament. Some of us think, "You know, it's gotten a whole lot easier. Oh, it's great—we don't have to have that high view of God anymore." Our view of God needs to be *higher* in the New Testament than it was in the Old Testament, according to passages like this.

Why does that make us humble? Don't turn there, but if you are note-taking, you might want to jot down Isaiah 6, because it's a great parallel. (Which, by the way, you could think of many—Ezekiel has the same experience; Daniel has the same experience; Moses had the same experience.) But Isaiah in Isaiah 6—here is someone who has this exalted view of God. Same thing happens: he now feels little; he feels sinful; he feels unworthy. He doesn't say, "I'm so glad I'm here—I want to get up to the front of the line and high-five God." He says, "I'm a sinful man."

You know the story. Fifty-second year of Uzziah's reign—King Uzziah was a very prosperous king. If you know anything about the story, Uzziah was so prosperous that the nation kind of got into a



complacent mode—as often happens in times of prosperity. Theology usually suffers in wartime and in persecution; theology usually gets very rich, very sharp, very biblical—and it stays that way, often, in the real redeemed church. In times of peace and prosperity, it seems our view of God continues to de-escalate. And so it was in the fifty-two-year reign of King Uzziah.

In that year when he died, God takes Isaiah and gives him this vision of God—high and exalted, lifted up and sitting on a throne—with the seraphim flying around. Now, you know the seraphim are the high-ranking angels that stand before God or administer before God, and in this vision fly around before God. But maybe you don't know that the word *seraph* is the word in Hebrew for *fire*—the burning ones. Remember that picture in Hebrews 12 where God is a consuming fire? He's surrounded here in this vision with fire, and they're calling out to one another, "Cool, fun, and hip is the Lord God Almighty." You know the verse—that's not what he says. "*Holy, holy, holy*"—separate, different, pure, exalted, transcendent, different than you—is the Lord God Almighty. And then that picture of his train filling the temple, and the thresholds shaking, and the smoke.

Isaiah's response isn't, "Oh, cool, I'm so glad I'm here. I'm going to pull out my phone—take a picture." What does he do? "Woe to me—I'm lost, ruined," the old translations put it. Why? "Because I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." His first response is contrition—is the fact that "I'm unworthy."

Be kind of like us all—pardon the imagery—all going to the beach together this afternoon. We all go home, we all get our swim gear on, and we go down and we're going to hang out at the beach—the Campus Bible Church beach. And you know, it's not like the real parties we have—we're just going to be full-blown beach people. You've got your swimsuit on and I've got mine on—pardon that image—and just, here we are, okay? We're hanging out.

Now, all of a sudden you're there, you've been there for an hour, and you realize that the scene instantly changes to where you're really not at the beach with everybody in their swimsuits—you kind of wake up to the reality that you're at a very, very formal black-tie dinner reception. It's like a banquet. And I'm there—not in my swim trunks shirtless—I'm there in a bow tie with a pressed black tuxedo. And everybody else has got their formal wear on, and you're the only loser with his swimsuit on. How do you feel? You felt fine when you thought you were at the beach with everybody—you fit in, you're sucking it in, feeling like "I kind of fit here." And then all of a sudden you realize in your forty-five-year-old body you're totally dressed inappropriately—we're really at a very serious formal dinner.

You see the change in perspective? Here is Isaiah feeling pretty good about himself after five chapters of talking about the sin in Israel. He now gets to see God and the environment of holiness, and he goes, "I'm a sinful person. I am not who I'm supposed to be."



Peter has that same response when here God shows his sovereignty—the incarnate God—and directs these small-brained fish into the net, and he goes, “Wow, this is the King of creation.” And he goes, “I’m a sinful person. I can’t even be in your—” That’s what bowing is all about—this picture of “I can’t be in your presence.” That picture of feeling so small and contrite and unworthy—that happens every time. And if you haven’t had that experience, then I don’t think you’ve cried out for forgiveness in the way that it is always presented in the Bible.

I know some people say, “Well, what do I need to get to heaven? I want to go to Disneyland when I die; I don’t want to go, you know, to the chain gang and go to hell. So what—do I pray a prayer, walk an aisle? What do I say? Okay, repeat after me.” Okay, great. If that’s your story of conversion, perhaps you haven’t really been gripped by the Spirit and had the conversion that the Bible talks about—where we see our sin for what it is in that contrite moment of seeing our sinfulness and crying out for forgiveness.

Do you remember what happens next in Isaiah 6 when he says he’s sinful? God says, “I’ve got a solution.” And one of the angels flies over to the altar, takes a glowing coal from the altar with tongs, brings it over, and is told to touch his lips with it—his sinful lips that he sees as sinful. And then it says, “Your guilt is relieved; your sin is atoned for.” You’re not going to reach out for the forgiveness of God until you see yourself for who you are before a holy God.

Some of you—it’s not been that way. Christianity to you is like some add-on, some kind of life coach. And if it’s not to you, man, you’re still a part of the crowd. You’re still interested, but you’re not converted. Peter had a conversion experience.

And if you remember what happens next in Isaiah 6:8—God, as he always does, seems to follow that up with something very simple. He says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And you remember Isaiah’s—probably the most memorable line from Isaiah 6—what does he say? “Here am I; send me. I’ll go.” It’s not like, “I don’t know—I had a lot of plans for this next season of my life. Garage needs cleaning. My wife needs more time with me, kids want to hang out.” “Here am I; send me. You’ve got a job? I’m here to do it.”

Isn’t that how it happens here in Luke 5? After this picture of his own sinfulness—the forgiveness part of it is going to play out in Luke. We don’t see the cross here in this passage, but clearly the cross is part of what he says to him here when he says, “Do not be afraid.” What’s he afraid about? His own sinfulness. “Don’t be afraid.” Taken care of—that I’m going to be taking care of that on the cross. Then he says, “From now on, you’ve got a job to do.” Who am I going to send? I’m going



to send you—from now on—to be fishing for people. When they brought their boats to the land—look at this now—they left everything and followed him.

So that's the thing about people that recognize the greatness of God and their own sinfulness, which is the required bottom-line prerequisite for becoming a Christian. The response to that is sacrifice—willing sacrifice—and eager service. People are willing to step up and do those things.

Number three on your outline—that's the way we'll put it: *Step up for service and sacrifice*. Those are the things that your life will be characterized by, and people will notice that. "Look at you—you now are all into doing things for this God that you say you love. You are willing even to endure sacrifice and things that you could do, would do, would want to do—you're willing to put those things aside to serve the God that you say you're loyal to." That's exactly what people will know you for: willing sacrifice and eager service.

A passage on that that may be helpful with this last one—1 Thessalonians chapter 1. If you turn there, here is a passage that so well illustrates what Peter is going to be known for—as imperfect as he was, and as imperfect as the Thessalonians were, as imperfect as you and I are. These are the things the world is going to see when they look at our life. People are going to notice these things about a truly converted person. Truly converted people will be known by their service and sacrifice for the Lord.

Look at verse 4—1 Thessalonians 1: Did you find that?

Verse 4: "For we know"—that's worth underlining—"we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you." How do you know? Maybe I'm just part of the crowd. Maybe I'm just interested. Maybe it's just an attraction to Christ and I'm not really converted. How do you know I've really been chosen and really am a Christian? How do you know?

Here's how (v. 5): "Because our gospel came to you not only in word"—you didn't just sit there as a learner and take notes—"but also in power," something happened, "and in the Holy Spirit"—he was involved, just like Jesus said in John 6—"with full conviction." Would that describe Peter's encounter with Christ there—*full conviction*?

"You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction"—underline this—"in much



affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” You received it—didn’t matter if it was going to cost you. You weren’t like the crowds in John 6. If it was difficult and tough, if it cost you, you were willing to do that—even with joy, you were willing to do that.

“So you became an example to all the believers” (v. 7) “in Macedonia and in Achaia.” “Not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia,” (v. 8) “but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what kind of reception we had among you, and how you”—here’s the picture of someone who’s truly seeing God through his standing in awe and really sees themselves for who they are—sinful, humbled—“you *turned to God from idols* to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

You want to be freed from the penalty of your sins? You want heaven? A lot of people out there saying, “Well, just pray this prayer; walk this aisle; do this thing.” It’s the kind of conversion—profound conversion—that when it happens in your life, that turning from idols to him will be characterized by a willingness to endure whatever affliction or sacrifice there might be, and a service that is obvious—that the agenda of God now has become your top agenda, your priority.

That’s not always what people see in folks that have prayed a prayer or walked an aisle. Around here we like to call it a PAT. It’s our cute little acronym—if you’ve been around, you know what that stands for: *Anything, Anyplace, Anytime*. You’ve heard that before? If not, that’s it—you’ll hear it again. Anything, anyplace, anytime—a PAT.

Now, if you think about that, that’s the kind of response of a repentant person—turning from sin, recognizing who they are in terms of their sin, their need to trust in Christ—saying, “Here I am—send me.” They’re known to say: anything, anyplace, anytime.

Peter is demonstrating that by saying, “Catching men—is that what you want me to do? Fine, I’m gone. I’ll put this priority to the back burner. I’ll make your priority my priority.”

You think Peter wanted to be a fisherman? Yeah. As a matter of fact, when he stumbled later in life—now Luke doesn’t record this, but John records it as a kind of appendix to his Gospel in John 21—after stumbling in the courtyard of Caiaphas, after kind of being demoralized by the fact that he wasn’t as great as he thought he was, he ends up going back to fishing after the resurrection. Christ is crucified, buried, resurrected. Now he’s like, “I’m done. I know Christ wanted me to be



this great leader and to teach and to catch men—I'm done tending to the people of God." He goes fishing.

Remember that story? It's a lot like Luke 5. He goes out there all night trying to fish for fish, and he gets skunked. The Lord of creation directs the small-brain fish to swim away from his boat. Then he shows up, because Peter's not doing what Christ called him to do. He'd rather be a fisherman than a preacher.

And Jesus there, interestingly enough, is cooking him broiled fish for breakfast—fish that he couldn't catch on his night of fishing. And he sits there as a little figure on the shore—Peter, skunked. He's done. He's ready to roll in and be done with fishing for the morning. And Jesus calls out and says, "Put your nets on the other side of the boat."

I don't know what's going on in his brain at that point, but he does it. And when he does it, what happens? Same thing that happened here—huge catch. All of a sudden the little small-brain fish swim right into his net, and he pulls in all these fish. When Peter recognizes it, do you remember what he does? "We've got to get this boat into shore." Is that what it says? Leaves the boat, dives into the water, and swims to shore. And you can imagine him swimming and watching that little figure get bigger and bigger. It's Christ. He knew who it was.

He got there and he had that very familiar conversation: "Do you love me, Peter?" "You know I love you—I *like* you a lot." "Feed my sheep. I didn't call you to be a fisherman; I called you to teach."

"Do you love me, Peter?" "Lord, you know I love you—I like you a lot." "Tend my lambs. That's what I called you to do. I don't want you being a fisherman."

Third time he says, "Peter, do you love me—do you like me a lot, really?" Peter was sad that he asked him a third time, "Do you like me a lot?" He said, "Man, if that's the case—feed my sheep."

"I know you want to do this, but I want you to do *that*." And Peter hung it up another time after the resurrection. He said, "I don't want to be a preacher right now," but it's not about what I want. "I'm willing to do anything." And he leaves behind the nets for good. He does what God asks him to do.



Maybe right now you're saying, "Yeah, I think God's gotten ahold of my heart." Just make sure that you've thrown everything on the altar. It's "whatever you want."

Any place, by the way. Maybe go back to another guy who had some encounters with fish—his name was Jonah. He was willing to be a prophet—just not in Nineveh. "I'll preach. I just don't want to preach there." Remember that? And God had a big lesson to teach him. That is: you don't really get to call the shots on *where* I want to use you. So many people say, "Well, you know what, I've got my life lined up, it's fine. I'll be used for Christ—as long as it's in this zip code." Really? You're so in love with the zip code in Orange County and weather and all that, you won't go wherever God calls you to go? If you had a Skype a little bit with our missionaries in Jordan—talk to the Thompsons about that—you'll recognize that it is never worth it for you to clutch to the idol of where you do ministry. It's *anything* and it's *any place* and it's *any time*.

You remember Moses—God wanted to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt, and he was ready to do it when he was 40. "I'm ready." And you remember how he fell on his face. He left really bummed out about the whole thing—as a fugitive from Egypt. He goes out and he becomes a shepherd. He gets real good at it after 40 years as a shepherd in Midian for his father-in-law, Jethro. He's out there doing the thing.

And then—the burning bush incident. Maybe you don't recognize this, but now he's 80 years old. God says, "Hey, I want you to be the deliverer and bring the people of God out of Egypt." And he says, "I wanted to do that 40 years ago—not now. Send someone else. Now's not the time." The Bible says he made God mad. He had all these dumb excuses. And he said, "I want you to go now." I know you feel old. *Go any time*.

You may have a timetable for God—can you throw that out the window and just say, "I know that when I come in a heart of real contrition—converted heart—I'm saying anything, any place, any time." Every time I share the gospel with people it gets down to this: "I don't want to give it up." Give it up.

Your version of Christianity feels like, "I've got to give it up." Remember the rich young ruler? I talked about him—just mentioned him briefly—but in Matthew 19 that was the whole thing. He loved his stuff. He didn't want to give it up. Jesus said, "That's your problem. You love that more than you love me."

What's interesting about that whole exchange—about the love that the rich young ruler had for his stuff—is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record it. But Mark was the one who added one little



phrase describing Christ as he looked in the eyes of the rich young ruler—remember what he said? He said, “He looked at him and he loved him.” Mark just took the time to record that and say he loved him. I know it feels like these Christians are trying to get me to give stuff up. This is not an ego trip for God. He wants you to give it up because he loves you. Not that those things are inherently bad, but you’ve got to give those up to be a follower of Christ. It has to go on the altar. We’ll see what God does with it. You may get to preach in the zip code you want to. You may get to do ministry where you want to go. He may let you keep the job that you want—fine. But you’re giving up the control and leadership of your life.

The words of Jim Elliot come to mind—the missionary who gave up his career in the States to go and be a missionary in a foreign field and ended up giving his life. What did he say? *He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

I know every non-Christian I talk to about Christianity—they get to that point of saying, “I don’t want to let it go.” You know the rich young ruler is not rich anymore—you know that? Not rich. What he clung to he couldn’t keep. But he gave up—as Jesus turned to the disciples and said—he gave up eternal life. Hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because they don’t want to give it up. Give it up. We’ll see what God does when you give it up. But that’s what a converted heart is all about—they’re known for sacrifice and service.

The good thing about doing this—and most of you could testify to this; if I opened up the mic, you’d say, “You know what? If we’ve done that in our lives, nobody looks back and goes, ‘Man, I wish I hadn’t done that. That was a terrible thing that I did—giving my life to Christ.’” So if you’re on the edge, like so many people are—you’re part of the crowd; you’re interested; you like coming to Compass Bible Church, whatever your story is—but you know your heart is not where Peter’s heart is, maybe today’s the day and you stop clinging to things that you can’t keep anyway. Because there’s a proposal on the table. And I know there’s a lot of counting the cost and sacrifice involved, and who knows where this might take me, and I’ve got to forsake others and renounce other things, and this has to be my priority. “But I don’t know that I want to do that.”

Just remember what you gain: not only the benefit of eternal life, but the relationship with the one that really—there could be nothing better, and no one better for you to connect with in this world—your Creator. The one for whom all things were not only made through and by, but the one whom everything was made *for*. Nothing’s more teleological, nothing’s more right, nothing’s more appropriate than for you putting it all out there, saying, “I’m yours.” A PAT. He’s no fool to lose what he can’t keep to gain what he can’t lose.

I hope that today, if you’re on the border of this whole thing, that God might be working in your heart right now. A good day to become a Christian. I know that because the Bible says, “Today is



the day of salvation”—any day you happen to be alive. And if you want to wait on it—that’s a stupid thing to do. Let me advise you not to. You have no idea what tomorrow holds. Make that decision today.

Would you stand with me? Let me dismiss us in a word of prayer.

If you’re sitting out there going, “Well, this sermon on evangelism—I’m already there. I’ve done that.” Don’t you, on your way through the processing of this sermon, make it perhaps like—people ask me to do these vow renewals. You have anniversaries and you celebrate the vows that you took in your marriage. It would be a good week for you just to bask and celebrate the relationship you have with Christ that happened in one way or another with the elements that we’ve talked about today: seeing the greatness of God and seeing our sin for what it is; turning to God; willing to serve him; ready to sacrifice. It was a good decision you made—then you find out that God had to grant, and God had to be a part of.

Let’s pray right now.

God, there are people here I know have to be part of the crowds. They may be pressing in and working to find a parking space and getting their seat in the auditorium. And our church has been blessed by a lot of people coming to hear the Word of God, and that’s great. But what we need, and what is most important, and what you think about when you look at these people in this building that love you, is you want to see them—*but first things first*. Let God be God in their lives—recognizing that whatever they cling to is an idol and a priority and a thing that they have an asterisk or a caveat or a footnote on that they won’t give up. Or they’ll follow Christ “as long as…” or “up to that point.” That none of that is worth it.

For all those that look at the “fun”—the quote-unquote fun—they’re having, that they know Christianity and Christ would demand them to put aside, let them realize what a foolish transaction it is to hang on to things that ultimately do nothing but heap up wrath for us for the day of God’s judgment.

And for those of us that have forsaken the world and followed Christ, I pray we could celebrate how good it is to be forgiven, to understand what it means to be in a covenant relationship with you—that we have with you something far more valuable than any of the idols that many people are willing to cling to, to give up on this relationship and to pass on it.



So give us a great week of just reveling and cherishing and celebrating the great thing that it is to be united with you. And for those, God, that need to see this happen in their hearts today—I know there's no prayer they have to recite or no form they've got to fill out. It's something you're going to work in their hearts, and we'll hear about it—I'm sure we will. They'll be baptized; we'll hear their stories. But God, do that work today. Let them not even get on the freeways or the roads until they get that right with you—even now, in the solitude and the sacred nature of this moment.

God, we're grateful for Christ, knowing that our salvation came at a high price. Please give us a real sense of urgency about the gospel—not just as people considering it ourselves, but once we embrace it, to pass that on to other people.

Thanks for this series on discernment—as unpopular as it is in our day. I pray that we become increasingly wise, discerning Christians, because we know the consequences for not being discerning about what a Christian is are catastrophic.

Thanks for this reminder from your Word and from the life of Peter. In Jesus' name, amen.