



Christianity in Real Life-Part 1

Learning from the Lord of Life

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We'll have to tell you that my washing machine blew up this week. Just so you know. And I realized intuitively that's a kind of replacement purchase you probably need to make right away. I thought about bringing home a bag of quarters for my wife, but I thought, no, I've got to go shopping.

So I got home and we went shopping, and I haven't shopped for a washing machine in many, many years. I had no idea how expensive they are now, by the way. But we were sold one—probably, yeah, probably not the one we needed. But we got one home after they delivered it, and it had more buttons and bells and lights. It made me think of R2-D2, you know, and it made similar sounds. I was amazed.

When they finally delivered it—it was Friday—I came home from work and I walked in to see this thing that depleted my savings account. And I said, "Well, this is amazing. Carlina, look at this. It's got Turbowash and Speed Wash and Allergen Wash and Duo Wash and, you know, Cotton Eco and Steam Fresh and, you know, salad-dressing-on-your-shirt wash," and just all these different things I'd never heard of before. I was amazed at how many options they had.

So I looked across at my wife and I was really serious. I said, "You better sit down and read this entire instruction manual on this thing." I get my head snapped back at me. She didn't say it, but I could see it on her face. It was like, "Why don't you ever read the instruction manuals that come with your stuff?" That was the look on her face, to which I reciprocated with a similar look on my face. A lot of conversation without any words going on at this point.

I was like, "Well, you know, I like to figure things out as I go. Men don't read the instruction manuals." That's kind of how I was responding. But there were just so many options, I thought, "You forget to read about this? You just can't take chances on washing my shirts wrong." I don't know, I just thought, "This is too crazy."

It made me think about the Sunday sermon, because by Friday I was well into it, getting ready for the message. I thought that's how a lot of people live their lives. They just wing it. They kind of figure it out as they go—like I like to do with stuff that I buy. Why consult the manual? We don't need that.



And I'm not just saying that literally—people like to wing it. I was reading this week a link to the Maricopa County ethics survey. It basically had all these ways to look at the issues of how people make decisions about what's of value and what's right and what's wrong, ethics and morality, all that. When it came down to it, one of the sections was on sources of authority. In other words, on what do you base your decisions for right and wrong? At the top of the list—out of all the respondents in this extensive survey—the top answer was “personal experience.” In other words, “Based on just how I do it, I see what works and I see what doesn't work, and I kind of figure it out as I go along.”

I thought, what an amazing thing—that the decisions of life, not just whether or not I'm going to cheat on my taxes this year, but the decisions about what I believe and what I value. I mean ideas about where I came from and where I'm heading and what my purpose for being here is, and the things I should prioritize. When it comes down to it, most people are just figuring this out as they go and trying things; and if they “work,” and some subjective impulse makes them feel like that was a good decision, well then they make more of those decisions. It's amazing—the arbitrary, subjective nature of people's decisions about big issues in their lives.

Life is full of options. You can make all kinds of decisions about how you're going to invest your life, what you're going to believe—and it's all based on information. The question really is where you're going to get that information. And you say, “Well, those are probably people who don't believe in God.”

I read another survey this week. It was a Gallup poll. In this particular poll, they're asking all these questions, and 95% of the respondents said they believe in God. Then there were all the things that were said for all these people who believe in God—and some of them didn't surprise me because I know people's definitions of “God” are pretty broad. But one of the questions was about reincarnation—“Do you believe that when you die you come back to earth and the cycle goes on?”—basic Eastern religious reincarnation. And 33% of the respondents—one third—said, “We believe in reincarnation.” Okay, you believe in God, but who knows what kind of god?

Well then they asked, “Do you go to church?” And of the respondents who said they went to church—not occasionally, not seldomly, not monthly, but weekly—think about that: “I go to church weekly.” You would think the question of reincarnation would drop from 33% to maybe, I don't know, 3%—people that are sleeping during church. But it wasn't that at all. Do you know what it dropped to? Only 25%. Think about that. People who say they sit in churches—Christian churches—listening to Christian sermons from the Bible, leave with an idea about their future that God said nothing about. As a matter of fact, He's very clear about what happens to you after you die, and there's no mention of reincarnation.



What does that prove to me? That even people who claim to go to church and believe in God, and who say that the Bible is a source of authority in their life—it's really not the primary source for a lot of people. They're able to believe things that are in stark contrast to the teaching of the Bible. Why is that? Because like a lot of people in this world, they filter all the things that they hear and mix it all together and come out with something that's based on what fits their experience or their preferences or their ideas or their feelings about things.

Life is filled with choices, decisions—things that you're going to have to base on something, some kind of information. Where do you get that information?

We're in our study of Luke. We've gotten to the beginning of a very lengthy—at least for our pace through Luke—sermon from Christ, sometimes equated with the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps it may be a Cliff Notes version of that; perhaps—and I'm inclined to believe this—it's a separate preaching event with a lot of the same themes. We'll call it the Sermon on the Plain. Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 5–7—He's sitting on a mount; and here He's described, as we'll see, as standing on the plain. Whether it's the same sermon or not, the bottom line is He's teaching about all varieties of things with a kind of authority that everybody stands back and says, "Wow, He speaks with authority," and He holds it out not as opinion or as random thoughts about good ideas. He's not Dr. Phil here; He's giving you authoritative instructions.

I've entitled this sermon, the subtitle: learning from the Lord of life. Because that's the way He sets Himself up, manifestly. What we'll see here—and all we'll be able to do is set the stage for this in verses 17–19 in Luke 6—is just how the stage is set for the sermon. We'll spend the next eleven sessions in our study of Luke unraveling every topic. As you look through the topics—if you've opened your Bible already to Luke 6—you'll see He covers all kinds of things. Don't just rely on the headings, because there's a real staccato and quick pattern through this text of all kinds of ideas that relate to what we consider true wealth, how we should view money, how we respond to pain, how to pursue satisfaction, how to navigate disappointment, what real joy is about, what things are worth sacrificing for, how to handle conflicts, what love is and what love isn't, ideas of justice and injustice, who to follow and who not to follow. The list goes on and on—things that you and I deal with every day.

Now, last week—just by way of context—as we studied the last section about the picking of the twelve apostles, we started with some orienting concepts: Jesus came to earth with a mission, and His mission was, in His words, to give His life a ransom for many. Then we said He also came with a message, and we codified that and crystallized it with the words repentance and faith. That's how He starts preaching—certainly in Mark 1—those are the first recorded preaching words of Christ: they needed to repent of their sins and they needed to trust in the good news of the gospel.



That, I suppose, typifies the message of salvation. If the death of Christ—the ransom of Christ—is going to apply to you, then you need to repent and put your trust in Christ. But that’s not all He went around saying, as a quick survey through the Sermon on the Mount reveals. He’s talking about all kinds of things—things that relate to more than just “How do you get ready to die?” I mean, here are instructions on how you’re supposed to live. And as we’ll see—let’s read it real quickly, verses 17–19—the things that He does remind us that He is the authority over all life. He is the manufacturer of life. He’s the one who can repair life. He is the one giving us instructions from the Manufacturer. Here are the rules—not just another voice, not an opinion—but the words of Christ.

Let’s start in verse 17 just to set the setting. As I said, we’re not going to get to the red letters today; we’re just going to set the scene.

“When it says he comes down—He came down the mountain—He, Christ, with them (that’s the twelve apostles), He stood on a level place. Now there was a great crowd of disciples (that’s not the twelve now; that’s the others from whom He picked the twelve) and a great multitude of people, not just the people that had been following around Galilee, but a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem.”

Now catch the geography of this, as we’ve had to note throughout the study of Luke. He’s now in a Galilean ministry up north where the Sea of Galilee is, around the cities that surrounded the lake, in or near Capernaum, where a lot of the action has taken place in Luke so far. Then Jerusalem is way down south. A suburb of Jerusalem is Bethlehem, where He was born, and that whole area is called Judea. As we’ve noted many times, that’s about a three-day walking journey if you’re healthy. To get to Galilee, it takes time. It’s like driving to Chicago—even at an aggressive clip, it’s going to take you a few days to get there. So people have come a long way.

“Not only that, it says, ‘and also from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon.’” Now, of course, if you think about the map in the back of your Bible, the Mediterranean Sea is off to the west, and northwest of where Galilee is are the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon—what’s now modern-day Lebanon, not far from Beirut. People came at least a two-day journey from there to hear Christ—not only from places we’re familiar with in Judea and Jerusalem, but from all over the place.

“And they came to do what?” Verse 18—two things: to hear Him (they’d heard about His teaching and His message; they wanted to hear Him preach) and to be healed of their diseases. “And those who were troubled with unclean spirits”—there’s a bit of a distinction from some disease you might have—“they were cured,” using a medical term to talk about the fixing of their problem. “And all the crowd,” verse 19, “sought to touch Him, for power came out of Him and healed them all.” This is an interesting medium by which He heals these people. But that’s what we’ve got.



You say, “Well, that sounds more like a healing service than a teaching service.” But look at verses 20 and following—that’s all we get is red letters, and He’s teaching. And He’s not talking about health, and He’s not talking about your diseases; He’s talking about how to live your everyday life.

So even before we get to our outline—even before we look more closely at verse 17—I just want to talk about that connection between healing and teaching, which we’ve already noted, but I want to go back to it. If you’ve got your Bible open to Luke 6, turn back two chapters to Luke 4. In Luke 4 we can make a few observations about when this conflict—if you will—in Christ’s time and calendar came to a place where He had to make some decisions. He could spend all of His time healing people, but He had to make decisions, and He gives us a sense of His priority here.

Drop down to the paragraph that begins in verse 38. You can see above—if you have an ESV—the heading reads something along the lines of “Jesus Heals Many.” In Capernaum there He’s having a bunch of events take place, as in Luke 6—people being healed of their ailments. But then in verse 42 He leaves. It says, “And when it was day (this is Luke 4:42), He departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought Him and came to Him, and would have kept Him from leaving them.” Think about it: if you’re healing people in town, there are a lot of sick people who can come from all over the place—“We’ve got more sick people here for you to heal, great!” But, contrast and conjunction—instead of staying and healing all those people—He says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well.” If it’s all about healing for Him, He would’ve said, “I’ve got people in other towns; I’ve got to take my healing service to another place.” Not what He says. “I’ve got more to preach.” Then He makes it crystal clear at the bottom of verse 43: “for I was sent for this purpose.”

What’s your purpose—healing campaigns, healing services? No. “My purpose was to teach.” What’s the combination between teaching and healing? We often see the healing in the setting associated with the teaching, as we do in chapter 6—all this teaching, preceded by healing.

Maybe think of it this way—back to the broken washing machine. Maybe it’s your washing machine and not mine that gets broken this week, and for some reason we pass in the hallway or you happen to be at church, and you tell me, “Hey, you know what, my washing machine blew up today.” And I say, “Oh, before you buy a new one, don’t do that—let me come over; I’m going to fix it.” So I bring my little satchel of tools and I walk into your laundry room or your garage or wherever your washing machine is. You go, “Well, I’ve already had the repairman out and he said you can’t fix it; I’m going to have to get a new one.” I spend like six minutes; I pull the back off of it—you don’t even know what I’m doing back there—and I shut it up and say, “Good as new.” You’re kidding me. Test all the buttons—working great. Wash away; have fun; use your washing machine.



Somebody's looking through—maybe they open their garage and say, “Wow, that’s amazing. My washing machine’s on the fritz, too. Can you take a look at mine?” “Absolutely, no problem.” So I start making the rounds in your neighborhood—everybody in your cul-de-sac. Fix everybody’s washing machine like that. And your jaw’s dropped—“Mike’s missed his calling; he should’ve been an appliance repairman. He fixes it so quickly and so great, and it’s just like new. Every machine he touches is like new.”

Let’s say I’ve done that for like ten people in your neighborhood. Then I say, “Hey, all the families in the neighborhood—matter of fact, I want to call everybody together—I want to talk to you about how to use your washing machine.” Would you listen to me if I had a little lecture to give on how to use your washing machine? I bet you would. Why? Because you just watched me, within six minutes, fix every washing machine that I touched. This guy’s got to know something about washing machines.

Do you see the parallel yet? Jesus starts the teaching ministry here by physically fixing broken lives—physically, right? You’ve got people who are paralyzed or who knows what their problems—skin diseases, leprosy—He touches these people and instantaneously heals them. Then He says, “Now let me talk about living life,” and He’s going to talk about everything from how to deal with problems to how to love, what integrity is about, justice, injustice—He’s going to talk about all these issues of life. Are you going to listen to Him? Absolutely. Why? Because He’s establishing Himself as the Lord of life. He’s the Manufacturer. We should listen to Him.

I’m not just speculating, by the way—these are the cues I take from the Scripture. If you’re taking notes, jot these references down. John 10:37–38. Jesus ties the miraculous events that He’s doing to why people should listen to Him. He says, “If I’m not doing the works of My Father”—saying the thing about God is He’s above natural—He’s supernatural; He can do supernatural things; He can speak things into existence—“If I’m not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me. But if I do them, even though you don’t believe Me (you’re struggling with what I’m telling you), at least believe the works. Can you look at it and see what I’m doing? Then you will know and understand that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father.” I carry heaven’s authority. Listen to Me.

What’s the point? He connects His ability to do the works of the Father with the fact that He ought to be listened to as though the Father is speaking—because He is God. And that should arrest our attention and make us say, “Well, you want to tell us how to use the washing machine? Take notes,” because You’ve obviously proved who You are—the Lord of life.



By extension, Jesus promised in the Upper Room discourse that the apostles would be chosen to codify and extend His teaching and fill in the rest of the New-Covenant instruction. Hebrews 2:1–4—worth jotting down—again, it’s about the message. “You must pay closer attention to what we’ve heard,” lest we drift away. “If the Old Testament message (the law declared by angels) proved reliable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just retribution,” how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? “It was first declared by the Lord, and then attested to us by those who heard” (those were the apostles). “God bore witness through these people by signs, wonders, and miraculous gifts of the Spirit.”

Think about that—the ability of these apostles, just like the ability of Christ, to—very rarely, by the way, in biblical history—break natural law. It was always prelude to the revelatory information God would give, which is supposed to be the foundation for the decisions we make in life—whether back with Moses and Joshua (those miracles that established the early Old Testament), or the miracles of Elijah and Elisha (that established the school of the prophets, with the codification of the rest of the Old Testament), or the coming of Christ and the apostles. Those three “rashes” of miraculous gifts provided the attestation—it “attested to us,” it gave the credentials—that when God speaks, it’s not just random thoughts; it’s not just opinion; it’s not to be taken as part of the soup that we build to decide what we’re going to do. We had better listen to this voice above all the others. It is the thing that should determine—as a body of information—what we do and what we don’t, and how we live.

Now, of course, Jesus came to tell us how to get right with God. But 2 Peter 1 says the information that comes along with that is the guide for our lives; we have to add to our faith, and He starts talking about all these virtues that come from the teaching of Christ and the apostles. To put it in the words of 2 Timothy 3:16—you know the passage about the God-breathed words—all of that was given by God; all of those things were good for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, “so that the man of God may be complete,” having all the equipment he needs to do good works—“ready for every good work.”

God wants you to live a godly life that reflects more and more the character of His Son. The teaching we’re going to find in the Sermon on the Mount is not just so you can learn how to get saved (though there’s information about that); it’s about how you and I can live in everyday life. And it’s not just opinion. We need to be different from the world.

As a prelude to the sermon on the plain, let’s take this paradigm for us as we deal with the body of information left behind—the Word of God. How did these people come to Christ? Let’s parallel that for us and do what is fundamental in a world full of opinions and voices.



Number one on your outline: be careful where you go for truth. Make sure that, like the people in the first century who came to hear Him—and not only to hear Him, but to get healed by Him—we recognize we can't sit on the coast of Tyre or Sidon or somewhere down in Judea and say, "Well, that's good information, I'm sure it's good for some people, tell it to me secondhand." These people worked hard to get there—to be in the presence of Christ, to hear what He said, and to have the benefits of what He was providing and giving—the credentials for His deity. Verse 17: He came down with them, stood on a level place—the twelve apostles; a great crowd of disciples along with them; a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem; from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases.

If you had a sick uncle and you were somewhere down in Judea and you knew the Healer was in Galilee, you'd better pack up the mule and get him there. In this case we learn you even had to touch Him—that's how people were getting healed. You had to seek Him out.

Here's the thing about us: we have, within the leather covers of your Bible, the information of God—God's Word in print—and you'd better go there to get information. Because here's our temptation: to get information about the decision-making of our life from a lot of sources. Let me give you a few options here, if you're building some sub-points under "be careful where you go for truth."

First, 1 Corinthians 1. Sometimes we're tempted to get authoritative information from the cultural elite—the "smarty-pants" of society: the PhDs, the seminary profs, the guys who write the scripts for the Discovery Channel or the History Channel. "Those guys know." And if they say something's true and the Bible says something else is true—and they're in conflict—well, do we mix it into a soup? Use that as the basis for understanding where we came from, where we're going, what we're here for? Or, maybe we'd be foolish—we're out of step with those people. Maybe we should just believe them and see the Bible (at least part of it) as some vestige of a superstitious age. "We live in the 21st century; we've got to listen to the smart people of our day."

Bottom of 1 Corinthians 1, start in verse 20: God challenges that temptation. "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" What do you mean? Verse 21: "In the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom." There was no reconciliation with God. "It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." You want to get right with your Creator, deal with the guilt, make sure that you're ready to meet your Maker when you die—lectures, journals, debating—never accomplished that. God says, "Look at that. Now look at what We provided—what God sent through the apostles and prophets." There's the message of truth. You know that experientially.



He says in verse 22: people want a lot of things—the Jews want signs; the Greeks want wisdom. “We preach Christ crucified,” the apex of history—“a stumbling block to Jews” and “folly to Gentiles,” but to those who are called (Jews or Greeks), “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I know we feel out of step when we’re mocked and ridiculed because our view isn’t the view of the cultural elite of our day. But when it comes down to it, God’s saying: compare the two in reality. What does the wisdom of God result in, and what does the wisdom of man result in? When everyone mocks me for not being in step with the latest ideas coming from academia, I always ask: “Do you want me to believe this generation’s academics, or the next generation’s academics?” Their views continually morph and change. God has spoken some things that, while you may think they’re antiquated or a vestige of some puritanical age, when it comes down to it, they don’t change. Not only have they been tested by human experience, but they have the imprimatur of God’s revelation—things like predictive prophecy, a resurrected, empty tomb. You’ve got things that make me stand on the body of information—some of it we’re going to get in this series for the next twelve weeks—and we’re going to recognize: if God said it, that’s true. Even if the cultural elite want to mock it, I’ve got a decision to make: What body of information am I going to use for my values, ethics, decisions, the directions and purpose of my life?

Here’s another one—letter B: your own intuition. That’s a popular one. It’s a little different than experience. This is not “what’s worked in the past for me,” it’s “what the present feeling of my heart is.” A lot of people think, “I’m going to make my decisions not on what the Bible says—I might give it some lip service—but when it comes down to it, if it feels right to me, then I’m going to do it.”

Jot this down: Genesis 3:4–6. It’s the heart of the turning point for Eve in her temptation. Satan employs the oldest strategy in the book: he gets Eve to make the decision that what God has said needs to be set aside because of what you feel. She “saw that the tree was good for food” (that’s her feeling and assessment), that it was “a delight to the eyes” (that made her happy), and that the tree was “desirable to make one wise.” All of those things were based on her impressions, feelings, intuition. She said, “God said one thing, but I feel another thing. I’m going to go with what I feel.”

The sermon on the plain we’re going to study is going to present some things that may grate against how you feel. It may not be conventional wisdom in your heart. But you need to decide: am I going to make decisions in my marriage, life, business based on what I feel is right, or based on principles God has clearly laid out in His Word—the Manufacturer’s instructions?

Letter C: the polls—consensus, what everyone thinks. Sometimes academia is not even where consensus is in our society. We see the folly of this already, don’t we? Things that right now are



condemned as silly if you believe the “old antiquated opinion”—whether it’s our sexual ethics or whatever—are things that the very people condemning us said just the opposite seven, eight, ten years ago. The reason they say it now is because we’ve passed the tipping point—“everyone in society sees this.” Maybe not everybody, but most. “Now that we’re in the majority, if you don’t agree with us about this, you’re wrong; you’re foolish.”

Think that through. When the polls determine what’s right and wrong—and not what God has said—you’re sure not only to have an ever-changing ethic in your life, but you’re going to recognize there’s no foundation, no benchmark—no measure of right and wrong, really.

1 Samuel 8:4–5 is a good example—the heart of the debate about whether Israel should have a king. They wanted a king. You remember why? “Everybody else has got one.” God set up a theocracy; they wanted a monarchy. Why? Because all the other nations of the ancient Near East were monarchies. “We want a king.” God said, “No.” Eventually, remember what Samuel says? He feels like they’ve rejected him as a prophet, and God has to say, “They haven’t rejected you; they’ve rejected Me.” Think about that: God’s way is set aside because “no one else does it that way.”

If you’re all about fitting in, this next set of sermons is not for you. A lot of the things—though ancient—are revolutionary because they’re in the minority. The question is: What will you base your decisions on? What will you found your values on? How are you going to live your life—based on the polls?

Speaking of experience (letter D): the Maricopa ethics study said that’s the number one most common way people decide whether they should do something, whether they should value something, whether something is right or wrong—their own experience. That’s pretty common, especially for Christians; it creeps into the church because people say, “Well, the Bible says one thing, but here’s what I’ve determined. If you look at things that are different than what the Bible says—if you look at something that’s in conflict with the Bible—and you see how that works, it really works out better. As a matter of fact, when we do it this way, I know it’s not the Bible’s way, I even see it be ‘blessed by God.’ It looks like it.” They’re very pragmatic about their decisions on right and wrong.

Turn to 2 Peter 3. This is reminiscent of Psalm 50, where people did things contrary to what God had revealed and were not immediately judged by God: “You transgressed My law; I kept silent.” Then they assumed, “You thought that I was like you.” “You thought I agreed with you—you thought My rules were your rules—simply because when you ditched My rules, I didn’t immediately zap you.” So you made wrong assumptions about right and wrong simply because I didn’t immediately respond. Or, from our perspective: “I tried something; it seemed to go fine. God

didn't seem to be mad; my life was encouraged; it seemed to be blessed. My experience says I should do things this way."

2 Peter 3:2: Peter calls them back to the Word—"the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles." Go back to what they said. "Scoffers will come... following their own sinful desires." They'll say, "Where is the promise of His coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." That's empirical: "You say God's coming back to judge a sinful world. People are living pretty sinfully and nothing's happening; they seem to be doing just fine." The point of the passage: don't let the empirical evidence of your experience allow you to believe that what God said isn't true. If God says something is wrong, it's wrong. If God says you shouldn't base your decisions on this thing, then don't. If God defines integrity, believe it—even if your experience tells you different—because there will always be a day of reckoning. God will open the books. And one of those books is the instruction manual He gave us for life. "Well, you know, my experience told me different..."

One more—letter E—drop down to verse 15 if you're still in 2 Peter 3. This one is most insidious, particularly within the church—the discussions you have in your small groups. "Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him... as he does in all his letters... There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures." Sidebar: Peter is equating Paul's letters with Old Testament Scripture. But the point is: some people take what the prophets or apostles wrote and twist them. "Therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away by the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

We're going to look at the words of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the sermon on the plain. There will be people with a Bible in their hand—many of them reductionists—who take one theological point and then try to get you to overlook all that the Bible teaches in other places. What we need to do is look at everything in this sermon and say, "You know what? I don't care if they're Bible-quoting—if they do not take the fullness of what God says (in this case regarding what it means to live a holy life), then we need to disregard them." Because the Bible says I will lose my stable position. That's where this message goes—the conclusion: if you disregard these things and don't put them into practice, there's a price to pay. So don't let someone—whether cultural elite, your intuition, the polls, your experience, or Scripture-twisters—get you to look at something clear and plain in the Bible and dismiss it as a foundation for your decision-making.

Friday night, after a crazy day of having our washing machine installed, I come home from work, mess with the buttons, have that conversation about instruction manuals. We realize our kids have to be taken in different directions, so we went out to dinner. It was Friday; we didn't plan to. Someone had given me a nice gift card to a really nice restaurant. We go to this restaurant, but, of



course, we didn't have reservations, which means you're going to get stuck at the worst table in the whole restaurant. That's exactly what happened to us—nice meal, wrong table. When they put you at a bad table, it's like the noisiest table in the place. I had Mr. Loud right behind me, who's just having a full-blown conversation—very colorful language—about all kinds of things that happened in his life this week. My wife and I are trying to have a conversation—mostly about the washing machine—but there we are talking, and literally every voice around our table seemed louder than my wife's. I realized the challenge that we have is much like the challenge I'm trying to present to you: the cacophony of noises in our culture vying for your attention—"This is what you should believe; here is the thing that you should base your decisions and your values and your ethics on." We've got to zero in and listen to the one conversation that matters. The one conversation that matters is when the Lord of life speaks—whether through His recorded sermon in these red letters, or through the extension and fullness of the New-Covenant information given through His apostles. Pay attention to what He says. There are all kinds of conversations that you can hear if you tune into them, but you've got to tune into the one that matters—because the one that matters is the one by which you will be evaluated one day. It matters.

I think of the new moms up here with their babies. As a new dad, your wife instantly gets this hearing upgrade when she has a baby. The TV can be on; there can be a siren outside; there can be noise everywhere and pots and pans clanging. If the baby whimpers down the hallway, she's hearing things that I don't think actually made any noise—and off she goes. It's like that: be supernaturally attuned to the voice of God. You don't find it in your intuition sitting on a rock somewhere; you get it by going to the Word of God—back, as Isaiah says, to the law and to the testimony—back to the Scriptures, as it's put in our passage in 2 Peter: to the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of our Lord and Savior through the apostles. Get back to it.

Be careful where you go for truth.

Briefly, number two: see your need for truth. Let me untangle that a little. In our passage, you need to see your desperate need for the truth. If you're sick and you need a doctor, that's pretty palpable—evident. You feel it; you know it: "I need help." It's interesting: for all the people running to Christ to get their healing, at the bottom of verse 18, there's not only people getting their diseases healed, but it says there were those troubled with unclean spirits, and they were cured. If you get a disease, usually that's just something that happens to you—you're a passive victim. My daughter is paralyzed from the knees down—we know she didn't do anything to get that. But when it comes to being troubled by evil spirits—and we've only touched on this so far in Luke 4, and we'll get into it more later—we see a kind of reciprocity, an invitation, a participation that usually leads to the troubling of unclean spirits.

That takes this need to another level that may not be as obvious. If I know I've got leprosy and I hear the Healer is there, I go and say, "Will you heal me?" and He heals me. But if I've got problems I caused by my own immorality or my own doing—if I've got spiritual harassment



because of spiritual failure in my life or participation in something wrong—now to think that He can fix that... there's a sensing of need that's not quite as elementary. These people came saying, "I need help." They knew they needed help because they knew that what they had was going to cause increasingly more difficult and complex problems. In other words, there was a price to pay if we didn't fix this.

I promised I'd get to the conclusion—or at least we should look at it. Let's look at the conclusion of the sermon—the Sermon on the Plain. At the bottom of Luke 6, you see Him wrap up this sermon the same way He wrapped up the Sermon on the Mount. Whether it's the same sermon or not is irrelevant; note the conclusion is all about application—recognizing the need to incorporate this data.

Verse 47: "Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and does them, I'll show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When a flood arose, the stream broke against the house and could not shake it, because it had been well built." Go back to verse 47. This "well-built" analogy is based on people who hear the word and do it. If you incorporate the sermon, you'll have a life that is well built—impervious to the kinds of destruction that will come if you disregard it. Verse 49: "The one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation; when the stream broke, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."

The need we have for the data in the sermon on the plain is greater than you may recognize if you don't extrapolate the damage that will come to your life if you don't incorporate the sermon. You need this truth more than you need healing. Let me even say this: this will aid you even more than immediate relief from the harassment of unclean spirits. What do I mean? Even if God could right now take all the damage from your marriage caused by your participation in things you should not do—and with a word or touch take it all away—what good would that do you a year from now, five years from now, ten years from now? It would do you no good unless you incorporate the sermon. That's the follow-through.

To think about the inferiority of healing: if I could go through every hospital room in South Orange County—start at CHOC in Orange and work all the way down to the hospitals—and heal everybody in every room, what good would that do them? It would do a lot of good right now. For some of them it wouldn't do any good five years from now. It would do none of them any good a hundred years from now—unless, of course, the real problem—the bigger problem—is dealt with. Those problems are addressed in the sermon, not in the healing.

It's provocative, perhaps, for me to say that even spiritual release from troubling unclean spirits is also really of no value in the long run unless the sermon is incorporated. But I don't get that just



from supposition; I get it from Luke 11. As long as we're near it, go there real quick. It is an interesting passage—Lord-willing we'll untangle it more later—but let's survey Christ's commentary on what He's doing in Luke 6.

Luke 11:24: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person"—would you not say that's what we're talking about when we talk about being cured of unclean spirits?—"it passes through waterless places seeking rest. Finding none, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order." Of course: all the trouble caused by the troubling unclean spirit has been tidied up—knocked-over lamp fixed, wall patched, painted. "Things are back in order." Problem is, in the assumption and inference here, there's nothing to take its place—no filling, no fixing, no real repair; it's just straightening up. "Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. The last state of that person is worse than the first."

Let me put it this way: every person Jesus healed, and every person with spiritual problems who was immediately and miraculously fixed, is going to be in worse shape if they don't incorporate the truth Jesus is about to preach. Do you see what I'm saying? The sermon is the most important thing. These truths are the most important thing. Even recognizing physical disease and spiritual maladies speaks to a deeper problem in our lives. The ultimate problem is standing before God on the day that you die—and, of course, the sermon addresses that. But it addresses a lot more: issues of love and forgiveness. Think about that: if you don't incorporate the truth of biblical love and forgiveness, what kind of crash might come when the storms hit your life? Lose my marriage, lose my relationships—could wreck a church—all of it if I don't incorporate this truth. Justice, leadership—you name it—you can add the crash. Build a chart: look at every topic God brings up in this sermon and say, "What happens if I don't incorporate it?" Crash here, crash here, crash here. The ultimate crash course is not being right with God on the day that you die, but there are a lot of lesser crashes.

Part of the problem in our lives is thinking that all we've got to do is "get our ticket to heaven." "I don't really want the ethics of God to cramp my style." There are a lot of crashes coming your way unless you see your need for the truth.

"Okay, well, let's hear the sermon. Preach it, Mike." The problem is: if you just want to hear it, you'll never have the advantage of the truth. It almost goes without saying—number three: we need to be responsive to the truth. That shouldn't be news for any of us, but we need to be responsive to the truth.

Again, building on the paradigm of people coming to Christ for healing in verse 19—I take it a step further by analogy: they came to Him, stood in His presence, listened to Him; but if they wanted



their healing in verse 19, Luke describes that they needed to reach out and touch Him. That's not the case in every situation—Jesus heals long-distance in other texts—but here these people had to reach out and touch Him; and when they touched Him, they got healed.

I don't want to make too much of that parallel, but when it comes to the teaching of Christ, really, it's more than just being in the presence of it or hearing it taught; it's about reaching out and incorporating that truth into my life. It's James 1—we quote it all the time because it's such an important truth for people hearing the Word every week: God wants us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, who deceive themselves. Sometimes, if you think you have a lot of biblical knowledge—"I know what Christ taught"—we think that's it. It's not. Sometimes it's painfully demonstrated—like in Dadeville, Alabama, a northeastern little town not far from Montgomery. Two people—look it up in the paper; this was some time ago—got into an argument about who had more Bible knowledge. That caught my attention right there—wow, a fight about Bible knowledge. Off they went, arguing and arguing—"I know more," "No, I know more." How many judges, how many kings—I don't know what it was like—but they're arguing. It got really red-in-the-face. It turned into a pushing and shoving match, they're yelling. One guy goes to his house, gets a gun, comes back, and shoots the other guy dead. He "wins," right? Think about that, how that reads in the paper—ironic. Men fighting over Bible knowledge—one murders the other. If you don't understand something so blatant—that there's a big difference between having knowledge of the truth and incorporating knowledge of the truth—that's what the Bible calls hypocrisy.

It's everywhere. Some people know a lot—like the guy that comes to the pastor afterward and says, "Yeah, I've been through the Bible a few times and it's made no difference in my life." The pithy pastor responds, "Well, it's not about you going through the Bible; it's about the Bible going through you." The reality is a lot of people want to put their head to the work; after they hit their head to the work, they don't recognize what they've got to do now is put feet to their Bible study and do what it says.

I quoted verse 47 in the sermon on the plain. Look at verse 46—before He says there's the difference between building on a foundation and one without a foundation—He says, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" Stop thinking you're "in" with Me—that you have some relationship with Me as Lord—if you're not willing to do what I tell you. If I fix all your machines and show that I'm the ultimate authority on appliances, and then I tell you how to run your appliance, and you yawn your way through it—take a few notes and never do it—don't call me the king of appliances. I didn't influence you to take my instruction seriously.

I know it's hard. Let me close with this passage—John 6. To be responsive to the truth is a commitment we're going to make up front at the beginning of the series—to say, "We're going to do it; we're going to respond to it; we're going to be doers of the Word," regardless of how it may grate against the cultural elite, my feelings, my intuition, my experience, the polls. I want to do it



because I know if this is really the Lord of life—the Holy One—I have no choice but to do what He says. This is the Manufacturer giving me instructions about how to live life.

John 6—drop down to verse 60: “Many of His disciples heard it.” He had just been talking about “the Father sent Me” (v. 57), “I live because of the Father; so whoever feeds on Me, he also will live because of Me.” “Oh wow—you’re making Yourself out to be equal to the Father; You’re making Yourself out to be the source of life; You seem like You’re taking the place of the Father in our lives. What’s with all of that?” “This is a hard saying,” they said. “Who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man”—now think Daniel 7 immediately—the Messiah possessing all authority, all dominion over all the nations, over all kingdoms of the world—“ascending to where He was before?” A direct allusion to Daniel 7. “What if you saw Me going to the Father, back in My glory? You’re complaining that I’m making Myself out to be like God and that I’m going to be the source of life for you—what are you talking about? How offended would you be if you saw Me in My glory ascending to the throne?”

Verse 63—it’s almost with frustration—“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” You’ve got to adopt them; you have to see them for what they are. “There are some of you who do not believe.” “For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him.” Verse 65: “This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father.” You need a supernatural work to be able to hear this and accept it.

After this, verse 66, “many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him.” There will be many of you—if not in this sermon series, then another—that if we preach it uncompromisingly, clearly, plainly, and expect us all—as creations of the God of the universe—to do what He says, you’re going to go, “I’ve had enough of this. I’m done. I’ll go to a church where I’m not going to hear all this.” You may turn back and say, “I can’t take it.”

But He turns to the Twelve in verse 67 and says, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” We’ve got no choice but to listen to You.

You know what that takes when everybody else is going, “Not going to listen to that anymore”? It takes humility—a lot of humility. We often quote James 1—“Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, who delude themselves.” The verse in front of that says, “Receive the Word with meekness” (humility) “that is implanted in you.” It takes real humility to recognize that if the King is the King, and the Holy One of God is the Holy One of God—if He says it, that settles it. You’re going to be mocked for it. A lot of the sermon on the plain—we’re going to talk about that. You’re going to



have ridicule in your life—from the polls, from the cultural elite. It will grate against your own intuition and your experience. Even the Scripture-twisters are going to say, “Oh, you’re all wrong. Why do you have to be so literal on all that stuff?”

Make a decision up front—a decision the apostles had to learn in the middle of Christ’s ministry: Where else are we going to go? We need this. One guy said, “People reject the Bible not because it contradicts itself; people reject the Bible because it contradicts them.” I understand that’s a problem not just for the non-Christian; it’s a problem for people seated in this room right now.

The Word of God is going to cut. Think about Hebrews 4—living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. Anybody you know that likes surgery? “I have surgery Tuesday—can’t wait!” Surgery’s painful. Recovery time, hospital food—it’s terrible. Nobody likes surgery, and yet there will be thousands of them in Southern California this week. Why—if it’s so unpleasant? Because it’s going to save their lives. They need it. There will also be people who die this week in Southern California who don’t get the surgeries that would have saved their lives. Why? Some of them are just stubborn: “I’m not going in for surgery; I’m not going under the knife; I don’t want that.” But it can save your life.

Here’s the thing about the work of the Word of God—active, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing (that’s the rest of the verse), down to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow—discerning even the thoughts and intentions of the heart. I know that sometimes preaching is unpleasant to some of you. You hit me with, “Why don’t we preach more fun, friendly things that make us feel better?” I’m just delivering the message. When it comes to the message, sometimes it cuts. But the good in God’s intention is to fix the problems in our lives—to come out the other side healthier—a life well built, that when the trials and troubles of this life come, it stands firm, impervious to disaster.

God wants to do a good work in your life. He’s going to do it through the preaching of His Word—in this case, it couldn’t be any more unadulterated in that we’ll take the very words of Christ and re-preach those in the next eleven sessions. Let’s be here with an open heart, ready for the Word of God to do its work in our lives.

Let’s pray.

Why don’t you stand with me; I’ll let you go and we’ll pray together.



God, we want You to do Your good work in our lives—many of us, at least I hope, I pray for most people in the room—because we recognize, as the rest of that Hebrews 4 passage says, we’re going to have to stand before You. You’re the One with whom we have to give an account. Not to mention, this is such a benefit for our lives—for us to live our lives in accordance with Your Word. Of course, God, what’s most important is that we’re ready for that last day when we step into Your presence across the threshold of this life. But as 2 Peter 1 says, we’ve got to add to our faith all these supplemental virtues which come from understanding the teaching of godliness. It’s good for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. We want to get trained through the sermon on the plain. We want to know all that we can know about every topic that Your Son brings up in His great sermon.

Prepare our hearts for it. There will be things that may be uncomfortable because they bring conviction in areas that are close to our hearts—things that call for change, adjustments. Like the mirror of James 1 holding up that reflection of the problem that needs to be fixed, we’re not going to want reform in that area; we won’t want You to touch that part of our lives. But God, we should know better. And like the apostles had to respond there in John 6, help us to say, “This is the information we need. Where else are we going to go? You are the Lord, the Holy One—Manufacturer of our lives. We were made by You and for You.” Help us, please, to be resolved—ahead of time—to obey Your Word.

So prepare us for this. God, thanks for this great opportunity to study this great sermon by Your Son. May it change our lives and bring glory to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.