



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 5

Excuses that Interfere with Our Preparation

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When, after a super important break for the holiday, we are now back in Luke chapter seven as we move through this series that we've been working on—one that we've titled "Preparing for the Kingdom."

Now, "thy kingdom"... let's define a few words here real quickly. I mean, the coming consummation of God's plan for his people—the reality beyond this life when we step into the next life—as I like to say, quoting Revelation, when "the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," the time when the enduring reign of Christ over all things is inaugurated. This thing that's promised continually in the Bible from the very beginning, ramping up all the way to the end—this repeatedly promised coming kingdom that Jesus assures us of more than anything else he's ever promised. I mean, this is the coming reality of the kingdom of God. That's what we mean by "kingdom," as we've studied it here so far in Luke.

And by "preparing," let's make that clear as well. I want to make sure that we are in—that we're included, that we're not excluded, that we are, as they proverbially say, the card-carrying members of the coming kingdom—citizens of the kingdom—that we know that we have a place there. And furthermore, to be sure that the way we live our lives today (this is part of the preparation) is an investment in what's going to be happening there. In other words, we're going to improve our lot in that reality—as the Bible regularly challenges us to do—by how I make choices today, this week, next month. Preparing for the kingdom.

Now, the enemy to preparing for the kingdom is seeing the kingdom as something distant—something "pie in the sky," something out there, something that's really not as urgent or as relevant as the things on my schedule this week. Something that we, unfortunately, don't have a pressing concern about in the everyday activities of our lives. That's the enemy of it all. And the strategy to kind of put this off is our tendency and our propensity to—not only procrastinate—but to make rationalizations for why procrastination is okay. In the vernacular, it's simply making excuses.

Now, that's not my diagnosis of the problem; that's Christ's. And before we ever get back into Luke 7, I want to show you him diagnosing this problem in Luke 14. So if you turn there before we get to Luke 7, I'd like for you to look at this with your own eyes. So bring it up on your device, or look at that



Bible that's in the seat there in front of you if you didn't bring one, and let's talk real quickly about how Christ worded the problem. And we'll look in more detail at our passage today in Luke 7.

But in Luke 14, Jesus—you can see in verse 14 there—has just talked about “the resurrection of the just.” There it is again: the reality beyond this life. When we get that reconstituted, remanufactured body, when we're in the place where the righteous are—that's coming. And in response to that, it says in verse 15, there was one of those reclining at the table with him (this is Luke 14:15) who heard these things and said, “Ah, man—blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.” That's going to be awesome. Man, awesome. So cool. Can't wait for that—be so good. And anybody there—so blessed to be there. It'll be great.

Now, the response of Christ is what we've learned to expect. He doesn't just say, “Yeah, get over here, high five me for that— that'll be awesome.” No, he says, “You don't get it. You're excited about it. You say you're excited about it. But a lot of people are confronted with this great reality of the resurrection of the just, and they're not real interested. Let me describe the problem with a story.”

Verse 16: he says, “There was a man who once gave a great banquet, and he invited many. And at the time for the banquet, he”—now it's a good phrase to underline—“sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began”—here, underscore—“to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘Well, come on, man, I just bought some property, bought a field. I've got to go see it, I've got to go survey it, I've got to check it out, I've got to figure out what I'm going to do with it all. Please have me excused.’ And another one said, ‘I bought five yoke of oxen’—that's a lot of oxen. This wasn't a donkey I bought. ‘I've got to go check these out; I've got to test drive; I've got to look them over; got to make sure I got a good deal. Please have me excused.’ And another one said, ‘I have married a wife and... I can't go. I'm done.’”

Now, here's the variety of people that he described, as “they all alike began to make excuses.” Now, that's not “all without exception”; that's certainly “all without distinction”—there's all kinds of people making all kinds of excuses. When the servant comes generally and says, “Come on, let's go—get ready for the kingdom—let's go! We're going to go to this great kingdom, it's going to be great, going to have the banquet. Awesome, huh?” “I've got very practical things to do. I can't.” Making excuses.

So what I'd like to look at today, particularly as it relates to the servants that he sends to prepare us for the coming kingdom—and the one being analyzed in Luke chapter seven—is John the Baptist. And Jesus, as you might remember if you think back before the holiday, had this discussion of John the



Baptist by Jesus saying, “You know what, he is the greatest prophet of all”—of course, excluding himself—“but he’s the greatest prophet. And he’s great.”

And they respond. Now, if you turn to Luke 7 with this, we’re going to look today at verses 29 through 35. As he starts to talk about this, now first we start with a parenthetical statement—at least that’s one option. If you’ve read your commentaries, you know there’s another option based on one word, but we won’t get into all that. The bottom line is, here’s the accurate, inspired assessment of what happens when he says this:

“When all the people heard this”—okay, you’ve just commended John as a great prophet—“when all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just”—now, that’s an interesting way to put it; more on that later—“having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers”—which is not the attorneys, by the way; this is the word that’s translated in some translations “teachers of the law”; they are the teachers of the Torah, the Old Testament law; they’re the academics, the professors in the seminaries—“the lawyers, they rejected the purpose of God for themselves”—also an interesting way to describe this—“not having been baptized by him.”

So you’ve got people that responded to the message; they heard it; they said, “Yes, you’re right; I’m going to stand in line, get baptized; I’m in.” Then you had other people say, “No, I’m not in. I reject it.” They didn’t respond.

“Jesus,” based on how people respond, “said this: ‘To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.” For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine’”—you remember, he was the weirdo out in the desert; he had his camel-hair outfit; he’s eating locusts, insects; he’s got wild honey; he’s out there like a monk in the middle of the desert—“he came like that, and you said, “He has a demon.” The Son of Man’”—speaking of himself, now in the third person—“has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.””

Now, commentary: “Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”



Now, more on that—we'll unscramble all that and figure it out. But let's just start with the overview of the whole passage. Here it starts with people responding to John; people didn't respond to John; people accepted John's message; people rejected John's message. Now he tells a story: what are people like? Well, they're like kids in the marketplace. One of them pulls out a flute and goes, "Here's a happy song—dance!" "I'm not gonna dance." Then you've got somebody saying, "Well, I'm going to play this dirge, this funeral march, this requiem." "You know what? You're so sad—I'm not into that."

And he compares that to John the Baptist in verse 33: he comes as very austere, very self-disciplined, doesn't care about what he's wearing, doesn't care about good food—he's just out there doing the will of God. And he's very stern and very strict. And you said, "That guy's crazy." Son of Man comes in a very different package with a very different kind of personality, a very different feel and tenor to what he's doing, and you say, "Ah, that guy is just—he's a glutton and a drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners."

Now, the picture here is of people going, "Don't want it," and they've got excuses like irrational children—don't make sense with their excuses—but they don't want it. So this is the picture. And the point is: the spectrum of excuses can go all over the map.

So I'm going to start the sermon just by trying to analyze a little bit of this. And let's title it this way—number one, if you're taking notes (and I wish that you would): **Be aware of the many excuses.** So there's our heading. Let's give us four that we can detect from our passage. What are the excuses of the people?

Let's start with—based on the illustration—let's start with this side of the illustration of the dirge. Because as he explains it, that's kind of analogous to John the Baptist and how people responded to him. See, the dirge is a sad song; it makes me feel bad; it's dour; it's stern; it's strict. And certainly, here's John the Baptist: he's stern and he's strict and he's all about "in your face," "who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" That guy's really stern and strict. Now, what did he say? He said exactly what Jesus said. But the way that he said it—and the package with which it came—that rubbed people the wrong way because it was too strict and too stern.

Now, four excuses. Let's boil them down into phrases that we're used to hearing, or maybe are even tempted to think of—reasons why we might say "no" to the truth of God. Put ourselves in two categories: maybe you're on the outside and you're not even a card-carrying member of the kingdom—you're not in the kingdom, you're looking at the gospel and you're thinking this way. Or maybe you're



a Christian; you're being called to spiritual growth—as you read the Bible, as you listen to sermons—but you're unwilling to move to that next level of spiritual growth and sanctification because you use one of these four excuses.

Let's label the first one right here because Christianity is “too strict.” And that really gets to the idea that whatever this next step for me is—whether it's getting in the kingdom or growing in the kingdom—it's going to curtail my freedoms. It's not going to be fun. I won't have as much liberty. It's going to cramp my style. “Christianity's too strict; this next step of obedience is no fun.”

Okay, now, we've all heard that, and we've probably all thought it. But when that starts to creep into our minds, we need to understand it. The picture of wanting freedom in our lives—and we don't want to be curtailed by the truth of God; therefore, we reject it. That idea of wanting freedom—I just want to do this this morning, in quick response to that excuse: I want to redefine freedom, because our understanding of freedom is often wrong.

And if you're taking notes (we won't take time to turn to some of these), but at least jot this one down: 2 Peter chapter 2, verses 18 and 19. Here's a great, insightful way to put it: there are people—here it comes—promising freedom. I love the way it's put: they promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. Now, here's the picture in that passage: people saying, “Hey, we want freedom, we're all about freedom.” But their “freedom” is nothing other than enslavement to sin. Now, here's the preceding verse—the end of it: they're enticed by sensual passions, passions of the flesh, and they do whatever they want to do, and they feel free in that. But as Jesus pointed out, when you're indulging in those sinful desires of the flesh, you are, in fact, enslaved.

Now, I can best illustrate this by—you know, as you turn through the dial on your radio, eventually you'll come across (at least on daytime radio) that financial guy that's always talking to us about “financial freedom.” You've heard his show: “Financial freedom! Be free! Financial freedom!” Now, all you've got to do is listen for five minutes, and you'll find that it doesn't feel very freeing, because now he's talking about how I can't spend money on this, and I can't spend money on that. You can't go to Best Buy this afternoon and pull out your card and lay it down and buy that stuff. You know, it feels very restrictive. Matter of fact, your pathway to financial freedom doesn't feel like freedom at all; it feels like a straitjacket. And yet, he's got an answer for that—what does he say? His little line is, “Live like no one else, so that you can live like no one else.” You've heard that. What's the point? Be willing to restrict your passions and spending now so that, in reality, when you go to Best Buy, you'll actually have something in your bank account, and you can actually buy those things and not go in debt. You'll be financially free if you are willing to restrict your freedoms. That's the pathway to financial freedom.



Right—now, we’re not here to talk about your money. But here’s the point: anybody promising you freedom—if it does not include the restriction of our passions—it’s nothing but offering enslavement. That’s what I’m talking about. The same way in finances, when it comes to your own heart though, you say, “I don’t like what Jesus is saying to me—whether it’s about becoming a Christian, because it won’t be any fun; it’ll restrict my freedom.” Real freedom is recognizing that’s a part of the pathway to freedom. The real freedom that God wants for us is to look back—let’s just think about the temporal life that we live—on the last two decades of your life and go, “Look at my life: I’m free from the vices, from the pits, from the corruption, from all the things that come from saying ‘no’ to my impulses and fleshly passions.” “They are enticed by sensual passions of the flesh; they promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

All I want to say is: your mind will play tricks with you about, “I don’t want to do that; I don’t want to be a part of Christianity; I don’t want to grow to the next level; I don’t want to say ‘no’ to that thing that I like that I know the Bible says I shouldn’t do; and I don’t want to do that thing the Bible says I should do because... it’ll restrict my freedoms.” Just remember to define freedom from a bigger view, with a bigger perspective. Let’s not be so myopic about that. I understand that John’s way sounded pretty strict because he put it in a very terse package. But at the end of the day, if people responded to the truth of John the Baptist, at the end they would look back and say, “Man, I’m free from the enslavement of a lot of sin in my life.”

What are the many excuses? They looked at John and said, “Oh, what a dour song he’s singing—I don’t like it; he’s crazy.”

On the other hand, they look at the Son of Man (verse 34). He came eating and drinking; he wasn’t out there eating insects; he wasn’t so stern; he didn’t look like a monk in the desert; he looked like a normal guy from a carpenter’s family. And they said, “Oh, you’re a glutton, you’re a drunkard; you’re a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”

Let’s think that through. Now, I know the spectrum of excuses are irrational. But the same people that on the one hand, at one moment, say, “You guys are too strict,” on the other hand turn around and say, “Look at the life you’re living— you’re trying to pitch some kind of Christianity that’s supposed to be about virtue and godliness, and you guys don’t even live up to that.” You want to put it in a phrase that we’re used to hearing—number two (or letter B): **“Christians are hypocrites.”** Ever heard that one? Oh no, that’s a new one to you, right? Of course you’ve heard it. “Christians are hypocrites.”



Now, that's what they were claiming about Christ. Christ is coming, teaching the way of God, and they were saying, "Oh, you're just getting drunk with those guys. You're just a glutton. You're hanging out with those tax collectors and sinners just so you can learn how to rip people off. That's all you're about—you're about money..." They're impugning Jesus' character because they see him as a bad guy trying to preach a good message.

Now, a lot of people reject Christianity on that basis. And, as a matter of fact, let's think at the second level: a lot of you think, "Well, if I really went to the next level—and I feel the conviction of God to start doing this in my Christian life (and I haven't done it in the past), or stop doing this thing that I know is not helpful, it's not profitable—and I know growth would mean going to that next level," you may look at the people that are already at that level and you may start saying, "I don't... I don't want to be part of that. I mean those people—they've got a lot of other problems." We start to impugn the people that are associated with that level of godliness. Or non-Christians look at Christians and go, "I don't want to be a part of that—bunch of hypocrites."

Now, with Jesus—was any of it true? Was he a glutton? Was he a drunkard? Was he there—passed out when you walked in his house because he's just drunk? No, of course not. That was a lie, which often happens. And Jesus warned us about that, didn't he? In the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, he said this: people are going to "utter all kinds of evil against you falsely." They're going to say things about you that aren't true, because that's kind of the obfuscation or the diversion that we do when we start attacking people with what they call the ad hominem attacks. "I can't really deal with what you're saying, but I can attack the messenger." And so we see a lot of things said about Christians that aren't true.

But all you'd have to do is take the focus off of Christ and broaden the circle and look at Christ and his disciples in the first century. And could you find some things that don't live up to the standard that they're teaching? Of course you could. One glaring example would be Judas. And all we'd have to do is focus on Judas and say, "Look at him—he's a crook; he's a criminal; he's greedy; he'll even betray Christ for a few pieces of silver." You could say that—and you'd be right. And sometimes people criticize Christianity, and they criticize it with truthfulness. There are some hypocrites—there are plenty of them. There are people that besmirch the name of Christ. To quote again 2 Peter chapter 2, there are people that "bring the way of truth into disrepute," or—as I think it's put in the ESV—"the way of truth will be blasphemed" because of you. Why? Because you do not live up to the message that you're proclaiming.



And there are a lot of people that, if you move to that next level of spiritual growth and development in your life, you can look laterally at people and say, “Well, you know... a lot of problems.” Yes—several of them do. I understand that. But let me quickly respond to this: “Christians are hypocrites” as a reason for you not to move forward is just an untenable proposition for you to live by. If that becomes your standard, it will never work in the rest of your life.

You can be sitting here looking over your belt buckle with that little roll and go, “Man, I need to get to the gym; I need to get healthy.” You’ve checked out on the surface thing about your health—“Yeah, I should work out more; I haven’t done it; so, you know, I should join the gym and go to the gym.” If you’re thinking that, I just got news for you: a lot of fat people are at the gym. “You don’t want to join the gym—fat people there. I’ve been there; I’ve seen it.” There are fat people at the gym. “Why would you ever want to go to the gym with fat people there?” Now, I guess if you’re thoughtful you’d respond, “They’re not all fat.” That’s a good response, by the way. When they say, “Christians are hypocrites,” that’d be a good follow-up: “Are all Christians hypocrites?” “Well... yeah... but not all.” But not all the people at the gym are fat either. You see what I’m saying? I understand that there are fat people in the gym. But if you want to get healthy, there’s the answer: you can ask your own fat body to get in there and lose some weight. That’d be awesome. But you don’t say, “I’m not going to the gym because there are fat people in the gym—that’s hypocritical.”

I understand that. But it is the answer. You know, I’ve learned too: there are a lot of bad people that drive Toyotas. I’ve noticed that. I mean, really—somebody messed up and I go, “What do you drive?” “A Toyota.” I figured. You know, I’ve got a problem with somebody because I walk through the lot for my office here next door and I see a lot of Toyotas in the lot. “What are you thinking, man? Do you know how many bad people drive Toyotas? Get another kind of car.” What’s your response to me? “Buy me one then, Mike,” right? “No? Then don’t ever say—how dare you drive around with a Toyota? Do you know how many bad people...?” No—you can’t live that way.

By the way, speaking of bad people—I’ve noticed a lot of evil Dodger fans. Just evil. Criminals. Drug addicts. Out there with their Dodger gear on—have you noticed that? Do you ever root for the Dodgers? How could you do that—evil people? Well, that has nothing to do, really, with whether or not I would choose to root for the Dodgers or drive a Toyota. And you know what I’ve noticed about ranch dressing? A lot of weirdos order it. “I’ll take a salad with ranch dressing.” Oh—another one. Is that going to keep you from ordering ranch dressing?

Do you see what I’m saying? You cannot live with a standard of, “I will not join a team because there are people on that team that I don’t like”—and I’ve got legitimate complaints against. And your non-Christian friend will tell you, “I can’t be a Christian; I’ve met some really cruddy Christians.” I



understand that. Well—talk about their car brand; talk about their favorite team; talk about their salad dressing—talk about whatever you want. It doesn't stop them. Why? Because they're focused on the virtue of the thing that they're adhering to. And if Christianity is the answer, then it really doesn't matter—it doesn't matter who's on the team. What really matters is whether or not you're going to avail yourself to the solution.

So stop with the, "I don't want to move to the next level of growth in my Christian life, because I know some people that do that kind of thing—they share their faith, or they give, or they serve—and I don't really like them." It's a really foolish way. The only way to deal with that is to curl up in a ball this afternoon in your closet and don't ever come out. Because everything you do is going to be joining a team of people that are going to—at least by way of example—you can find examples of people that you don't like.

There's a third excuse—this one a little bit more subtle, perhaps. But I want to go up to verse number 29—sorry, verse number 30. When we talk about the Pharisees—speaking of hypocrites—the Pharisees were known as hypocrites. But I'm going to go beyond that. I understand that we've got people saying "Christianity is too strict" or "Christians are hypocrites," and they don't want to engage in it. But there's another reason the Pharisees didn't accept the teaching of John. And again, I've got to go outside of the text for this, but if you just look up every reference to the Pharisees and start looking for, "What is the motivation for them rejecting this?" you'll see this not only through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but into the book of Acts. You'll see that often it is identified by the authors that they are struggling with embracing the truth because the people that deliver it—they're actually envious of. It actually says in Matthew 27 that's the reason they crucified Christ: they were envious of him.

Now think about this: the envy of someone toward the messenger can keep them from adhering to the message of the messenger. Because to do that would be to submit myself to them as a conduit of this message. It would look like I'd have to step down here and not be seen as superior, but be seen as a learner from the messenger.

Now, there are a lot of ways we could state this, but to try and seek maximum application across the board—from non-Christians becoming Christians and Christians growing in their Christian life—let's just put it this way (letter C): **obedience is embarrassing**. And it was for the Pharisees. Can you imagine the Pharisees with their PhDs standing in line to get baptized by the crazy man wearing the camel outfit and eating—with grasshopper breath or whatever? You know, I would think, "I'm not going to do that." It's going to seem like he's got the answers and I don't have the answers. I don't want to submit myself to the teaching of that messenger because of envy. And it's exactly what's going



on in the book of Acts as well: they're looking at the people preaching—and they're former fishermen and tax collectors. They're not going to submit to that. Obedience is embarrassing.

Last week, I quoted this in our Resurrection Sunday sermon: if you were here, Luke chapter 9 verse 25— that asks me a good question: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world...?” Let's think in terms of the vein of what we're talking about: I gain a great reputation—everybody thinks I'm cool; I would never join that band of people or submit to their team. You can gain all of that but lose your soul—if that's the answer. If you're worried about what people think of you—which, according to the Bible, it says repeatedly the Pharisees were very concerned about what people think of them—and you may be really concerned that people think well of you and you don't want to submit yourself to the teaching of an ancient book or the church or whatever seems so square to you—you can gain it all. But if that's really the answer—and it's going to save you eternal punishment—or growth in the Christian life is really going to advance your standing in the kingdom, then this is a dumb proposition.

And to speak about what we're talking about, I should quote the next verse for you— I quoted Luke 9:25; verse 26 goes on to really get down to the heart of it. He says this: “If you're ashamed of me and my words in this wicked and evil generation, I'm going to be ashamed of you.” He gets right to it. It's shame, isn't it? I'm ashamed. I'm embarrassed.

I thought of this recently when we had that earthquake. And it happened to come early in the morning when all the morning news shows here in L.A. were going on. And it was funny because it played all day—and certainly, if you're a YouTube guy or whatever, you watch all these hits on the funny reactions of the newscasters when everything started shaking in the studio. And the ones that looked the most freaked out we laughed at the hardest; and the ones that dove under their desk—we laughed at.

Now, let's just think: he's read all the YouTube comments about what an idiot he is and how foolish he looked. So the next earthquake comes—and it's not a 5.9 (or whatever it was); it's a 7.8. And he's sitting there going, “I don't want to look stupid; I don't want to look stupid; I ain't getting under this—I know what happened last time; people laughed at me.” I mean, right? Was that a bad image? You know what I'm saying: just risk looking stupid to save your life. That'd be awesome. What does it profit a newscaster to gain a really Charlton-Heston reputation and get his cranium cracked open? That's the point that Jesus is making—not specifically, but that's the principle.



Maybe somebody who really cares about what he looks like—the ship is going down—“Get your life vest on and move to the exits.” “I’m not putting the life vest on; this makes me look fat—I don’t want to...” What are you talking about? Why do you care what maligning, disdainful mocking that comes from that? Doesn’t matter. I would hope, newscaster—no matter how hard they laughed at you—if there’s another earthquake: save your head, get under the desk. **Obedience is too embarrassing.** I can’t take away the fact that you will really garner mockery and disdain from this world if you obey Christ—I can’t. I can’t promise you that if you become a Christian you won’t be mocked—because, in fact, you will be. But I can say it really shouldn’t matter to you. Ultimately, it’s much more important for us—speaking of non-Christians becoming Christians—to gain your soul. And for Christians, in terms of advancement in the Christian faith, there’s a lot more at stake in storing up treasure in heaven than sparing yourself a few laughs from coworkers—or snickers even from Christians that think you’re going over the top as a Christian zealot. **Obedience is too embarrassing**—let’s check that one from our excuse profile, in our box of excuses.

There’s one more word here that describes another group of people, and though they’re closely aligned in the Bible, verse 30 says the Pharisees (which, I’m guessing now—understand I’m trying to do detective work—I’m assuming part of their reason for not obeying John is it would be embarrassing for them to do it). But then there are the lawyers. The lawyers (which, again, are not attorneys)—these are the teachers of the Torah. These are the people that give themselves to the study of the law, and they train the young rabbis, and these are the professors in the universities—the teachers of the law. What would their motivation be to reject John?

Now, I’m assuming it’s related—because, much like the Pharisees, there’s a lot of self-aggrandizement; there’s a lot of, you know, high opinion of themselves. I’m sure there’s some pride that doesn’t allow them to submit to the teaching of John. But let’s go a little further in terms of the kind of thing that I’ve found—at least in the erudite elite, you know, the educated people in the high towers of academia—even when they’re claiming to understand the things of Christ. And I got a great example: when I was traveling in Europe and I was speaking over there. And one day I went to meet a friend of a friend and have lunch with him. He’s getting his doctorate at Cambridge. And we have the whole Cambridge experience—punting on the Cam and checking out all the stuff there—and then we go to lunch and talk with this guy.

Now, he’s writing a dissertation on things that clearly were germane to stuff I was just preaching on in the book of Hebrews back when I was having this lunch with him. So I’m talking about things that I’m doing—“Okay, I know something about... you’re writing this; you’re going to be a PhD from Cambridge; you’re a super smart guy with a really cool accent—but let’s talk about these things.” And the more I talk with the guy—you know, talk about trying to nail Jell-O to the wall—I could get nothing definitive out of this guy’s mouth about anything. Everything was nuanced; everything was a little “yeah, but...” Everything was all over the map. And I just wanted to say, “Well, what does it



mean, and what do we do?” And no matter what the principle was, it was like, “Well, nothing’s definite; nothing’s sure.”

And I found out something in that moment that I’ve seen so often through that whole strata of people that kind of live up here in the ivory tower—the teachers of the law: when it comes to answers from God, oftentimes they reject them. Let’s put it this way (letter D): **“It just couldn’t be that simple.”** It’s just not that simple. It’s got to be more complicated than that.

What was John preaching? He wasn’t a PhD. He didn’t go to college. He was sitting out there in the desert, saying, “You’re a sinner. You’re in trouble with God. The wrath of God is coming. Repent—demonstrate that by baptism—then get out there and bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” “Well, it’s got to be more complicated than that.” I mean, I’m sure that had to be part of the rejection of the teachers of the law: “It’s too simple.”

I think of Naaman. We came across him in Luke chapter 4 when we were studying through Luke here, which took us back to 2 Kings. When Naaman, who was the commander of the Syrian army, came down with leprosy—remember the story? He has leprosy; it’s really bad. And his boss, King Ben-Hadad of Syria, concerned about his crack general here—he knows that in Israel, in the neighboring country, there’s this guy that’s gaining great fame in the country named Elisha, and there are miracles attributed to this guy. And so he sends and says, “Would you please send Elisha over here to Syria, because I want to really get this guy on my team. He’s so important to us—this great commander—I want the commander of my army to be healed. And I know that this guy—Elisha—can probably do it because I’ve heard he’s done it. So bring him over here to our country, and let’s heal my top guy.”

Now, Elisha is not a jerk—he’s not being a jerk—but he’s not like the “healer for hire” either. So here’s what he does: he says, “I’m not coming to Syria.” Not that he doesn’t care about him—in fact, he’ll show that he cares in that he’ll send his servant to their country to tell him: if he wants help from me, he can come to Israel. So word goes out to Naaman, and he reluctantly comes. He does—with, as the Bible’s careful to point out—a great entourage and all of his chariots. So he comes with all the pomp of his great status and all the regalia of being the great commander of the army in Syria. And he rolls up into town, and he finds out where Elisha is, and he sends his door-knocking servant up to the door. And I always picture it with a speakeasy little door opening—“Hello?” And it wasn’t Elisha, it was his servant (because he’s no slouch either). And so the servant opens the door: “What can I do for you?” “Well, it’s my boss—he’s out in the chariot here; he’s Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army; he’s got leprosy. And I hear your boss can do something about that.” “Okay, just a minute...”



Goes to the back corner—I don’t know what Elisha’s doing, working on a message or something—he’s in the corner writing something. “Hey, boss—we’ve got the neighboring country here, Syria, and their commander of the army out here in a big chariot with a bunch of people—and it’s amazing; you should see it, a long line of limos out in front of the house—but he wants to be healed from his leprosy. Can you come see him?” Now again, he’s not being a jerk—you read the rest of his life; he’s a nice guy and all that—but he doesn’t even get up out of his seat. He sends the servant back: “Go tell him to go wash seven times in the Jordan River, and he’ll be cleansed.”

“Hey—the boss says you need to go... take your boss; he needs to go dip in the Jordan seven times, and he’ll be cleansed. Have a nice day.”

Well, I love the text there in 2 Kings: it says Naaman (to translate this Hebrew word) was furious. Furious. And we get a little into the brain of Naaman in that passage because it said he thought the prophet would come out—some big meeting, some big event, some big dramatic thing—wave his hand over the... have some dramatic healing: “Let’s do it right, man—let’s do it the way I envision it.” And so he’s furious. He leaves in a huff.

And what’s great is—there’s, I don’t know who it was—somebody in his entourage, one of his servants, finally as he’s going away (frustrated and angry—and the Bible says furious), one of his servants talks a little sense to him. And I love it—he just quotes the bottom line of what the servant of Elisha had said: “Hey, you know, boss, I know it’s kind of humbling and all; it’s really simple; it may seem stupid to you—but the prophet did say—here’s the word—‘wash and be cleansed.’” I mean, we’ve come a long way—I don’t know how many miles it took in this journey—but he turns the chariots around and the entourage around, and he goes into the Jordan. And you imagine the humility of being in the Jordan River, as he had already told his entourage, “We’ve got great rivers in our country—why do we have to dip in the Jordan River?” Dipping down once, twice, three times... and he humbles himself and does the precise, very simple thing that Elisha asked him to do. And the Bible says on the seventh time, he came out of the water—and you know what happened? Healed. The writer of 2 Kings says, “and his flesh was like the flesh of a newborn baby.” “Get some sunscreen on your boss,” you know—he looked like a little baby. Perfect skin.

I’m telling you: there are a lot of people that look at our Christianity—as deep and profound as it can be in the mysteries of theology—and they’re saying, “What you’re telling me is I get my eternal ticket to the kingdom of God if I repent of my sin (these things that seem so... I don’t know—really? that’s going to matter?) and put my trust in Christ and the cross? Ah... I don’t know—there’s got to be more to it than that.” Or even you, looking at the thing that you’re facing in your family, in your job, in your life—in your mind, the answer is simple. Oftentimes it is.



This was driven home to me again—I was in Pastor Pete’s office; I saw a book on his shelf; I pulled it off; it was this old book. I looked at it, and I was just so intrigued. Sitting there at the end of this meeting, I said, “I’ve got to get one of those.” Went on Amazon Marketplace, bought one—1932, something like that—old, old book—1930s. And it’s almost 1,000 pages on the things facing the family and marriage today—in the 1930s. I want to read this. And I’m reading page after page. And you know, I study my Bible in the morning—when I’m done, I usually take a book and read a little devotional reading—and I’m reading through this book, and I’m thinking, “This is great stuff.” And it’s how old—80, 90 years old? I’m like, “How can that be?” Well, because it gets back to what the Word of God says. And not that the guy wasn’t a smart guy—he’s a smart guy—but he’s getting back to the answers that have always been there for us.

And I find if you took those answers and gave them to a family in trouble, a marriage in trouble—most people, when they share that with their therapist or their psychologist—“That’s crazy.” Happens oftentimes—they’ll say something, “Well, I know, if you’d get back into the Word and you’d start to pray...” “Oh, don’t... you know, I gotta take two verses and call you in the morning,” right? Well, you know—listen: it may sound simple to you, but there is power in the basics of what God has given us. And you want correctives for your thinking? The Word of God is the answer. You want a fix for your heart? Yeah—prayer is the answer. I mean, these are things that you just need to get over—that you want the sophistication of a book. Because if you talk to a publisher today—if I wanted to publish that book today—they would laugh me. I know what it’s like to deal with publishers, and I’ve been published; I get all that. And they want something new—like in Acts 17: give me the Athenians—“Tell me something I’ve not heard! Some pizzazz!” And you don’t want a book that’s going to call people back to the simplicity of self-denial and reading the Bible and spending time in prayer. And, you know, there are great fixes for marriage and family problems—but, “I don’t know... don’t want to publish that—it’s already been done.”

I’ve just got to tell you—you’ve got to humble yourself. And you know, the answers are usually much more simple than we want them to be. So when you say to yourself, “Well, it sounds too simplistic; it couldn’t be that simple”—don’t buy into what, I assume, is part of the excuse of the lawyers for rejecting John and his baptism.

Now, we spent way too much time on the first point—which is why I gave you a little extra room on the worksheet this week. Did you notice that? I knew it’d be long—but not this long. So let’s quickly move on.



Now, I know we're taking this all out of order, because we've jumped into the middle of it—we're working toward the edges. But let's go back up to verses 29 and 30 and look at the juxtaposition of the acceptance of the people (many of them) and the tax collectors declaring God just and getting in line to be baptized with the baptism of John—and then compare that to the Pharisees (verse 30) and the lawyers.

Now, here's what I want you to catch: **“who rejected the purpose of God for themselves.”** Now, we don't like to think of it that way—or we don't normally think of it that way—but think about what you're doing if you're a non-Christian rejecting the gospel, or you're a Christian rejecting the teaching that's going to take you to the next level of Christian growth. You are not just rejecting a message or the messenger—you're rejecting the purpose of God for you.

I'll put it this way—number two: **understand the battle.** And if you want to sketch the parameters of the battle, here are the parameters of the battle: when God speaks in his Word regarding what it should be for your family, your life, your business, your morals, your ethics—or you trusting in the cross of Christ—this is God's purpose for your life. What's the battle? Well, you have your own purpose for your life. You have your own path for your life. And those are the two things you need to see at war with one another. So often they're not in sync: God's purpose for you and your purpose for you.

Now, the Pharisees and the lawyers—“That's not my purpose for me—to stand in line and get baptized by John.” But **that was God's purpose for them**, and they rejected that. And like a couple of times ago when we were in our text, we talked about the kids—the third graders—who had the assignment to say, “If you were in charge of the school, what would it be like?” Remember how silly those things were? “Put chocolate syrup in the water fountains; I want Six Flags rides on the playground; I want limo rides to school.” And I love the one I read first, I think: “And the teachers are not allowed to talk.” Well... that's great—that's the mind of a third grader establishing the purpose for their lives that they would choose. But it comes in conflict with the purpose of the teachers and the administrators and the parents.

And all I'm saying is: would you compare who the kids are with who the adults are—and then just realize that that's a **very small analogy** compared to the distance between **you**, a mortal, struggling your way through life, and the eternal, sovereign God of the universe who **knows** what's best for you. He knows what's best for your marriage. He knows what's best for your life. He knows what's best for your heart and your mind and your imagination and your conscience. And when you sit there and you say, “I don't know if I want that,” and you see in your mind all these excuses start to bubble to the surface—realize what kind of battle you're in: **your purpose** or **his purpose**.



Even when you say it that way, it starts to make it clear—what am I doing? And isn't that how we quickly highlighted it from Luke 14 last time we were together? And that was: it's like a king with an army that's got 10,000 with an army coming against him with 20,000—you're outgunned here. It doesn't really make sense for you to insist on your purpose for your life when God has been clear about his purpose for your life.

Now, there are two arenas in which this takes place—and just to grab the whole of this text, I want to go down to verse 35 (and we'll bounce back to verse 29 in a minute—I know we're all over the map here; play ping-pong with me this morning) and just start here as we think of the two components. Verse 35 says, "Wisdom is justified by her children."

When you think about the **battle of God's purpose versus your purpose**, his onslaught—his **assailing**, his **blitzkrieg** (how about that German word?)—the blitzkrieg of his assault (if we're going to call it a battle) on your purpose for your life is going to take place in two arenas. And the first one is **wisdom**, and wisdom takes place in the context of your **mind**, your **rationale**. In other words, when the wisdom of John the Baptist, as a messenger of the King, comes out—or when Jesus preaches a parable or a teaching of the kingdom—and it comes, it assaults first your mind. It comes to you as **wisdom**.

Now, if you look up "wisdom" in a Hebrew lexicon, a Greek lexicon, or an English dictionary, and you say, "Well, what is wisdom all about?"—one word you often find in all of those books is the word (in English) **soundness**. A sound, reasonable argument. It holds water; it's tight; it works; it's one that is hard to refute because of the soundness of it. That idea of soundness in wisdom is one that helps us think through what we often see in Jesus' life, in that when Jesus responded to people with wise responses, they **couldn't say anything**.

Case in point: Luke 14:5. They're mad at him because he's healing on the Sabbath, and he responds with a wise retort. He says, "You're condemning me for healing this guy on the Sabbath—I've just got a question for you: can you see the parallel here? What if your kid falls in a hole on the Sabbath? You going to leave him there till the next day? How about your ox when it falls into a ditch? Are you going to leave it there?" Now, let's just look at the parallel between what I've just done and what you're talking about. And I love the response in verse 6: "they could not reply to these things." Now, that's wisdom. It's not that you can't reply (you **can** reply), but if you do reply, you look at what you just said and you say, "Well, that sounds stupid." That's what wisdom is all about—wisdom leaves no **reasonable** comeback.



And when the wisdom of God comes through the prophets of God or, in our case, the preachers of God or the reading of the text, and you're assaulted by the purpose of God for your life, it has a kind of mental, rational soundness to it that you've got to do what a lot of people do when they're hit with sound arguments: they have to somehow divert to another topic. I talked about ad hominem attacks—this is a classic. It's one of my favorite passages in Acts 6—you don't need to turn there; no time for that. But when it speaks of Stephen, there's a great statement of all the people that were against Stephen (this is in Acts 6:9), and it lists them all and they're all ganging up against Stephen. The next verse (v. 10) says this: "But they could not withstand the **wisdom** and the Spirit with which he was speaking." I love that. He had something about what he said—they had no response to. "So they all accepted it." No—verse 11 says, "Then they secretly instigated men who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.'" They had to go some other route to attack because they really couldn't deal with the argument.

I just want you to get that scenario in the depths of your mind and recognize that when you're seeing something and God is clearly calling you to forsake that sin or step up in that area of obedience—or you're a non-Christian and you know the conviction of that truth is there in your mind—and the wisdom has found an ally in your brain, and you're starting now to make excuses and move to other topics—the end-around—just know there's an excuse there, and you're dealing with the assault of God's wisdom on your brain. That's important to detect.

Understand the battle when truth seizes your mind—the Bible calls that wisdom—and it's something that has no reasonable comeback. I'll just throw this in because we read it today in our annual Bible reading (if you do our DBR): Luke 21:15 says, "For I will give you [the disciples] a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." That's what wisdom is about. And when it came down to it, what John said—no one could argue with. They did—they rejected it; they called him names; they said he had a demon; they called him crazy—but they couldn't argue with the truthfulness, the soundness of what he said.

That's one front. There's another front. If you're going to understand the battle, you know it's not only about a battle in your brain—let's use another part of our anatomy: it's a battle in your **heart**. When truth seizes your heart, it's more than just a kind of mental sense of "Wow, that's right." There's a sense of **conviction**—that's the biblical word—in your heart. When truth comes through a prophet, a preacher, you know, in the Bible, as someone who gives you the truth—there's that sense of wisdom that's hard to respond to, and then there's that sense of conviction, which is a feeling of "Guilty—he's right." That idea of conviction in your heart—I want to underscore that from verse 29: "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they **declared God just**"—now, I read that without any pauses, but that's a weird statement, is it not? "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors



too...” Like, was “people” not a broad enough term to include the tax collectors? You don’t say, you know, “all the dogs—and the German Shepherds, too.” Why do you need to pull them out? “All the people—and the tax collectors too—when they heard this, they declared God just, having been baptized...” That’s often happening. Why? Because the tax collectors were at the top of the list of people who they saw as “bad guys”—the sellouts (we say this all the time, right?). If you’ve been to Sunday School, you know the tax collectors were collecting money (revenue) for the Herodians, for the Romans. And so they were seen as turncoats. They were always skimming off the top. So that was always a problem for people—they saw them as notorious sinners.

Now, they’re singled out in this passage. And again, I don’t want to make too much of this, but if you look elsewhere in the New Testament you find they’re often the kind of people with such a bad résumé that when they come to Christ it comes with a great and powerful conviction. Their hearts are struck. One passage on this (you don’t need to turn there, but it’s in Luke 18—you probably know the story): Luke 18, Jesus told a story about the tax collector and the Pharisee that went up to the temple to pray. Smile at me if you remember that passage—remember that? And they’re up there, and the Pharisee is like, “I’m glad I’m not a loser like the rest of the people in the world.” And then the tax collector is described this way: he comes up, approaches God; he stands far off; he won’t even go to the center of the Temple Mount; he wouldn’t even lift his eyes up (which was the normal way that they did in their posture to pray and to worship)—wouldn’t even lift his eyes to heaven—but he **beat his breast**, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” You want a description of conviction? That’s it. I don’t know what caused you the last time to take your fist and start beating your torso—that is a sense of brokenness. “Be merciful to me, a sinner.” And Jesus says this: “I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified**, rather than the other [the Pharisee]; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” The humility—it comes from the truth. And the truth seizes not just our brains; it seizes our hearts. And when it seizes our hearts, it leads to that feeling of conviction.

That’s the battle. And when you feel it, according to Romans 1, you can respond by giving in to that, or you can respond by **stuffing** that out of your heart—**suppressing the truth**. And while you’re busy making excuses, the commentary of Romans 1—catch this now—is: you’re **without excuse**. We may make them, but none of them are any good. You’re just diverting, end-around, obfuscating. It is not a valid excuse.

Truth seizes our minds (it’s called wisdom). It seizes our hearts (it’s called conviction). Clearly the tax collectors were convicted. Surely the idea—embodying this in verse 35 as “wisdom”—and John 7 reminds us that it seizes our minds. That’s great. Well—when it does, what do we do?



Number three: **respond rightly**—rightly respond to the truth. And they responded. Now, it seems like (I know you think) this is a really mixed-up set of verses today. I do that, in part, because of the way this is laid out. There are two bookends on this little section of Scripture—verse 29 and verse 35. I want to end with these. Verses 29 and 35 both use the same verb to describe something that is very odd for us, because it reads funny. Let's start in verse 35, because it's clearly translated there: "Yet wisdom is **justified** by all her children." Now, think this through: wisdom is justified by her children. That means the children of wisdom—those are usually called the **wise** kids, the wise people—they **justify** wisdom. It's a weird phrase. Same phrase in verse 29—only it's a different object. It says, "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they **declared God just**." If you have an ESV in your lap, look at the marginal reading—you see the footnote there? And you can see how it reads. How's it read there? "They **justified** God." Now, think about that. You think, "Well, I understand now why they didn't translate it that way, because that almost sounds blasphemous—'the tax collectors justified God'?" Well, it's the same thing in verse 35; only the object isn't God—the object is wisdom.

When God was speaking through John the Baptist to have people repent and be baptized and bear fruit in keeping with their repentance—when they responded rightly, they **justified God**. That's odd. "Wisdom"—the children who are wise and see the wisdom in the teaching—they **justify wisdom**.

To respond rightly has a couple components. And the first component is this: **we justify God**. Let's not write it that way because that's hard for us to process (because we usually see the word "justify" as a verb that God does to us), but here it's people doing it to God. To **justify** is to **declare** something **right**. Therefore, the first response to the conviction of God's truth is to **declare it right**.

Now, think about it—flip it around just for the fun of discussion of this real quick: when Christ **justifies** us (or, as it's put in Luke 18, which I just read, "this one went to his house **justified**"), God declares that sinner **righteous**. You follow this? He says, "You've repented—that's what I'm looking for. I will declare you righteous. I will now call you righteous even though you're sinful, because you are broken and contrite." If you trust (here's the rest of it in the book of Acts), if you trust in Christ specifically and his death and resurrection, you will be **justified**—he declares you righteous. Now, that's, as Luther said, a **legal fiction**. You're not, but he **imputes** the righteousness of Christ to you so that he considers you righteous.

When you flip it around, and we now are **justifying God**, it's not a legal fiction. We're actually just saying, "God is **right**, and he's **righteous**, and what he's doing is right—it's **just**." Same word in Greek, by the way: "right" and "just."



We are considering him just; we are considering him right; we are **declaring** him right. Therefore—let’s get back to our thought now—when we are confronted with truth (whether you’re a non-Christian confronted with the truth of the gospel, or a Christian confronted with something about your spiritual growth), you can make excuses or you can respond rightly. To respond rightly—the first component—is to say, **“He’s right.”** And, by the way, when you say, “He’s right” about something that’s been in conflict—your purpose for yourself and God’s purpose for you—and you say, “Your purpose for me is right; you are right,” what are you saying about your purpose for you? **It’s wrong.**

Now, there’s a word for that in the Bible—*homologia*, translated **confession** (*homo* = “the same” in Greek; *logia* = “to speak,” “to state”). **To say the same.** When we confess our sins (because he’s faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness), what are we doing? We’re looking at the way we’ve done something, and we’re saying, “I agree with you that what I did was wrong.”

The inversion of confession is that **we are declaring God right.** And when you are struck with the truth, what I want you to do (I’m not trying to get you to yell out “Amen! That’s right!”), I want you in your heart to say, “If that’s the truth,” then you declare it in your mind **right.** And if it’s in conflict with what you are doing, you declare **yourself wrong.**

By the way, I don’t want to get too far in this, but confession flips around to when we get saved, according to Romans 10: I’m supposed to **confess** that Jesus is **Lord.** I’m agreeing that he is who he says he is. I’m confessing. Then I look at my own sin and I confess—I agree that I’m sinful. If I then **declare God right**—I justify God—he in turn **justifies me**, declaring me righteous. That’s probably too much information. But here’s the point: I start—with whatever the situation is—making a **declaration:** “God’s right.”

That’s not having to say it out loud, but that’s in my mind saying—so much “Christian counseling” goes on today; so much in the pew goes on where people hear something, they know it’s right, and they never really declare that it’s right. They never—even in their heart—say, “Well, **that is right.**” And you’ve got to start there. Everyone’s got an asterisk on it—“Well, that would be right **if...** and, you know, I’d be wrong **but...** you see, that ever happening? I’ve got a thing; I’ve got a syndrome; I’ve got a disorder; I’ve got stuff, man. And so I’m not fully wrong, and God’s not fully right.” It starts with: **He’s fully right; I’m fully wrong.** Whatever the conflict is—that’s where we respond rightly to truth.



Lastly, verse 29: “When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just—**having been baptized** with the baptism of John.” Now, there’s not only the **declaration** (“God, you’re right; I’m wrong”), but when you’re struck with truth—whether it’s the gospel or whether it’s the next level of Christian growth in your life—I have to then **respond with my actions**. I declare that you’re right—in this case, John the Baptist: “You’re right; your message is right; I’m wrong; I repent.” Now, what do I do? “Be baptized—and bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” So they got in line and got baptized.

Now, Pharisees and lawyers—they rejected the purpose of God for themselves, which was to repent, to be baptized, bear fruit. And they weren’t going to do that. What’s the point? All faith, all repentance—if it’s real—is **followed by actions** that back it up. They didn’t just declare God right—then they got in line to get baptized. Baptism is not the point here (although that was the command and it is the command for us as well). The point is **obedience**.

Now, I’m out of time, so let me just end with this one. Give you an example of a tax collector who responded rightly to God— you want a good picture of it? Let’s go to Luke 19. We’ll close with this. Luke 19: one more example of a changed tax collector. We read about this if you’ve been keeping up with our DBR this week.

Luke 19:1—“He [that is, Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through”—little desert town of Jericho in the Judean desert. “And behold, there was a man”—you remember him—**Zacchaeus** (makes for a good flannel-graph story). “He was a **chief tax collector**.” Now, you think it’s bad to be a tax collector—it’s bad to be the chief tax collector. You think it’s embarrassing at the dinner party to say you work for the IRS—just say you’re the head of the IRS. Hate to be relevant, but it’s a bad thing. “And he was **rich**.” Look at that. And how did they get rich? Don’t say “bonuses”—that’s part of it—but in their day, it was skimming off the top. They’re not honest. They take more than they’re allotted to take. So here’s the chief one, and he’s super rich—and his name is Zacchaeus.

“And he was seeking to see Jesus”—because he was, you know, driving through the town here with his little entourage—“but on account of the crowd he could not”—oh, poor rich Zacchaeus—“because he was **small in stature**.” Little Zacchaeus. “So he ran on ahead”—okay, well, here comes the crowd; “I’m going to run on ahead”—you can see his little legs—“and climbed up into a **sycamore tree** to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place”—you can see the branches of the sycamore tree; they’re hanging over the path—“he looked up and said, ‘Zacchaeus...’” Can you imagine? Never met him. I don’t know—I mean, just—bam. “Hey, Mister...”—you know—“Richardson!” “What?” He says, “Hey, Zacchaeus, hurry”—your little legs—“and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” Wow—that’s just an amazing thing. Zacchaeus was just interested in



seeing this guy he's heard so much about. He comes along, names him by name, and says, "Hey—get down here. I've got to come to your house." "So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully."

"And when they saw it"—here's the onlookers (usually the Pharisees leading this charge)—"they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a **sinner**.'" "Yeah—he's such a hypocrite, that guy."

Now, I would love to have a verse between verses 7 and 8 to hear how the discussion went down. I don't have that. All I have is Zacchaeus' response to his lunch date with Christ. I don't know what was said—but I can imagine. But here's the upshot:

Verse 8: "Zacchaeus **stood**"—that assumes that he was sitting before this; I can imagine, right, maybe reclining at the table with Christ—he **stands up** and he makes a declaration. "He said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the **half of my goods** I give to the **poor**. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything'"—and you know he had—"I restore it **fourfold**.' I'm going to pay them back four times what I took." "And Jesus said, 'Today **salvation** has come to this house, since he also is a **son of Abraham**.'"

And what's the thing about Abraham, all of a sudden? Now, there are some contextual reasons for that—but think about this: Abraham was the man known as the **father of faith**, the leader of Israel. But he was one who, when God the Father spoke to him (at times, through the mediation of Christ—I can assume; different sermon), he said (like, "Leave Ur of the Chaldeans"; Genesis 22: "Take your son, your only son, the son that you love; go to the mountain I'm going to show you, and sacrifice him there.")). I don't care how hard the command was; I don't care how many excuses he could have had, and how many things he could have had in his repertoire for saying, "I shouldn't do that; it doesn't make sense; not now; I don't want to..."—no matter what the reasons were: when God called him, he **responded**. When the truth confronted Abraham, he **responded**. He declared God right; himself wrong; and he **acted**. And he said, "You know what—you're just like Abraham. Today salvation has come to this house." "I'm going to justify you, since you also are a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

I don't know **when** the kingdom is coming—right? God didn't tell us when it was coming so that you **wouldn't** have procrastination as a part of your life. He wants you to **get ready**. Some of you are here as non-Christians—it's time for you to get saved **today**—put your trust in Christ. A lot of you are Christians, and there are things in your life—you know that you're under the conviction of God; your



brain and your heart are under conviction—and it's time for you to let those things go. There are things that you know God is wanting you to step up and do, and you've read it in his Word, and you've been encouraged in your heart—and you need to do that. **Stop making excuses.**

Let us recognize what our responsibility is when the conviction of God's truth encounters our life.

Now we're out of time, so I'm going to have you stand up, and I'll dismiss you with a word of prayer.

Pray with me.

God, we know and understand how difficult it is—because we've all had the difficulty—of looking at the purpose that we have for our lives and seeing it in clear conflict with the purpose you have for our lives. And like little spoiled brats in the marketplace, we oftentimes... nothing's quite right. The package isn't right; the messenger isn't right; that rubbed me the wrong—we've got all kinds of reasons we don't want to respond.

And God, it is nothing but a cover for the fact that we, in our own lives, have our little way that we want to impress and put down as the path for us—and we don't want to give it up. As we often say, the battle is rarely with our mind; it's usually with our will. And so, God, as we think about our proclivity to make excuses—and being sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, we're in a long line of excuse-makers—we want to **declare war** on those excuses today and be much more sensitive to the **wisdom** of your truth and the **conviction** of your truth.

And we'd like to more readily and more definitively declare **you** and your truth as **right**—whether it hits us with the call to initially repent and put our trust in the finished work of Christ, or whether it's the next step in our Christian life in terms of sacrifice or saying “no” to sin and “yes” to righteousness. There are things that we need to just declare—without any excuses—that **you're right**, and we need to **act**.

Let us be like **Zacchaeus**—we look forward to meeting him and seeing, putting a face to this story—who, when he heard the truth, had nothing to say but responded with **obedience**. God, we love that



example. We'd like to be a **son of Abraham** in that regard as well. So make that the case for us, as we learn to despise our own excuse-making and are quick to respond with **confession** and **declaring you right**.

In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen**.