

Your Role in the Harvest-Part 3

When Your Efforts Don't Yield Fruit

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Well, you know the old saying, “Take no wooden nickels.” Remember that one? Well, in this case, I would hope that you do. The ushers are going to give you a wooden nickel. So take one of these; it's called a reverse offering this morning. And grab one of those wooden tokens—that's what they actually are.

Once you get a hold of one of those, I want you to look at it and make it a part of your everyday life, at least for a while. You'll have to read it at least once, and then you'll feel it in your pocket, I trust, and remember what it says. The verse says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” which is where we started our series three weeks ago. On the reverse it says, “Pray for the Lord to send out laborers into His harvest.” That is how we started this series three weeks ago.

Then we talked about not only praying that that would take place amongst our congregation, but then we said we need to risk—to get involved. We looked at the instructions there to the 72 in Luke chapter 10, verses 3 through 9. And then I hope that was something that you did put into practice, as I did this week—speaking up with non-Christians about Christ.

And then this week, we reach the very sobering instructions as they continue in Luke chapter 10, verses 10 through 16. So wherever you're going to interact with this every day, just have that tactile experience of feeling that and going, “Oh, that's right, I live in a harvest field. I'm a representative of Christ.”

We started the series by saying we need to pray to the Lord to send more laborers into the harvest. I want to make sure and pray corporately for our church—that individuals within our church would do that. And of course, last week, we shifted to ourselves and said, “Let's make sure we do that.”

And then today, as you open your Bibles up to Luke chapter 10, verses 10 through 16—even if you were with me so far, saying, “Yes, let's pray that our church becomes more evangelistic; last week, let's personally get involved and risk getting involved in conversations with people about Christ”—I can guarantee you, if you do not take in the message of this week (verses 10 through 16), you may get in the harvest for a week or two, but you will be quickly out of it.

Our passage this week—if you just glanced at it here just before we read it—you can see it's about rejection. And you will never be fruitful in your evangelism efforts until you learn to deal with rejection. You're going to be rejected. And if, when you're rejected, you walk away from this and you're cooled, and your desire to do evangelism and your efforts to do evangelism all retract, then we're never going to be the kinds of evangelical Christians that we're called to be. You will never be an ambassador for Christ—doing what you are called to do as an ambassador for Christ—if you don't deal with rejection and keep plowing ahead.

I think of the 1923 baseball stats for Babe Ruth. You baseball fans know that year he not only held the number one spot—most home runs of anybody in the league—he also had the highest batting average of anybody in the league. And those who say, “Oh yeah, I thought he was good at batting,” I get all that; even if you're not a baseball fan, you know that. But what you may not know—in 1923 he also led the entire league in strikeouts.

I think that's hard, in our minds, to reconcile. He had the best batting average, he had the most home runs, but he had the most strikeouts. Yeah, he did—the most strikeouts. So this tells me something about how he approached the batter's box. He got into the batter's box with a great ambition to hit it over the fence. And every time he got into the batter's box, that was his mentality. And when you're swinging for the fences, you're going to strike out—I mean, it's going to happen. Matter of fact, for him, he struck out more than any other player in the whole league that year. And yet he went back into the batter's box and kept at it, swinging for the fences. And he did more than anybody else—he hit it over the fence.

Now, that's just the way we need to live our lives in a lot of areas, and that's what you teach your kids, right? You teach them to walk from the batter's box to the dugout after striking out—learning to deal with that rejection—so that they can go back into the batter's box the next time and get a hit. I mean, you teach them to go to tests and to take their tests, and when they get to a question they don't know the answer to, you don't teach them to get up and walk away from the exam and quit. You certainly don't teach them to go get a job—say they get some sales job—and the first time they get turned down, the second time, the third time, and no one buys their products, “Well, I guess you're not a salesman,” and you quit. You have to persevere through these things.

And when it comes to the first-century Babe Ruth of evangelism—the apostle Paul—here is one who stepped into the batter's box, so to speak, every time with an ambitious biblical optimism. He says this in Romans chapter 1, verse 16—you know the passage—“I'm not ashamed of the

gospel, because I know it's the power of God unto salvation to all who believe." Think about that. "I know that I can have a conversation today with a non-Christian that will powerfully change his status in heaven, the direction of his life, and transform who he is." That can happen.

Now, if you look at the Babe Ruth of biblical evangelism in the first century, you might say then, "Did he strike out a lot?" Absolutely. As a matter of fact, his strikeouts weren't—he not only struck out; he got beamed more than any other batter in the first century. If you don't know your Bible, 2 Corinthians chapter 11—he gives a long list of how much he was rejected and how vehemently he was rejected. He talks about the fact that he was in prison so many times he didn't even know—I don't know how many times, he says. "I got beaten with rods three times; I even had the capital sentence of being stoned to death—and they expect you to die when that happens—and I had that once and walked away from it. I was whipped: 'forty times minus one,' thirty-nine times they can do to the Jewish" — what did he say? "Five times." Not to mention how many times people just said, "Hey, Paul, we don't want to hear it." Or like Festus, as we looked at last week, "Your great learning has driven you mad; you're crazy."

Paul struck out a lot. That did not prevent him from getting into the batter's box every time he had a conversation with a non-Christian and saying, "I know this is the power of God to save people. I'm not going to be ashamed. I'm going to swing for the fences again." And do you think you have a long line of people that follow the apostle Paul through the gates of the kingdom, saying, "I'm here because that guy, humanly speaking, spoke to me about Christ"? Absolutely.

And we've said, we don't want you to get into this life—to walk into the presence of God in the kingdom of heaven—and not have anybody behind you, saying, "That gal spoke up about Christ. That's why I'm here," from a human perspective. "That guy was gutsy enough to share the gospel with me, and that's why I'm here." This is what we need. This is what we want. This is what we're called to.

Verse 10 begins a discussion about how to deal with rejection. Let's start there and read the seven verses that follow. "Verse 10: But whenever you enter a town, and they do not receive you"—that's the theme; it's going to continue on through verse 16—"go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you.'" That's a strange little Jewish idiom. The Romans had one; they talked about washing their hands—remember, Pilate washed his hands and said, "I don't want anything to do with this. I'm done with it. I've done what I can do." The Jewish symbol—the picture, the expression—was to knock the dust off your feet.

“Nevertheless”—bottom of verse 11—“tell them this.” Tell them—they need to know—that “the kingdom of God has come near.” You had it; we were dealing with important eternal issues here. I mean, you heard it; you don’t want to receive it. And you know how close you were—I mean, you miss out on this. This was big. But you’re going to have to move on.

And then he gives us perspective—verses 12 through 15: “I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” What do you call—isn’t that the name of a city? What—what do you—Bethsaida? I should get this in some logical context for you. Remember, as I’ve said each week in this series, they’re moving from the northern region of Israel—Galilee—around the cities and villages around the Sea of Galilee. Now he’s moving his ministry to the south in Jerusalem, where he’s going to end his earthly ministry; and all the villages and towns there—he has to pass through the middle section, which is Samaria. That’s what we had in chapter 9.

Now he’s sending the 72 into all those towns and villages to prepare people for the coming of Christ into those towns. And he says, “Now go there. If they don’t receive you, knock the dust off your feet. Tell them they came close—the kingdom was here; you refused it.” And then he says, “Remember, it’s going to be more bearable for the people of Sodom—the most notorious evil city of the Old Testament—than it will be for them, because you came there with power,” as we saw in chapter 10, verse 9, “to heal people in their streets, and they still rejected it. And I’m telling you, judgment’s not going to be good for them.”

Then he starts quoting cities of the north. He’s saying, “Think back to our experience. Think back to Chorazin”—which was a city around the Sea of Galilee—“and Bethsaida,” another Galilean city. He said, “If the mighty works done in you”—and those two cities—“had been done in Tyre and Sidon,” another pair of cities that were notoriously evil—they were rich, they were idolatrous, they were oppressive to Israel—“if the things done in Chorazin and Bethsaida were done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have”—now note this carefully, middle of verse 13—“repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.”

If you want to know what the message was of the two-by-two going into the cities as Christ was coming, it was repentance. It’s exactly what Mark 1:15 says: “Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” What’s the point? If you want to receive the King—if you want to be rightly related to the King and be a part of the kingdom—you’ve got to see sin for what it is and repent. And the ancient Near Eastern most dramatic expression of that was to dress not in nice clothes, but in sackcloth, and to throw ashes on your head. That was the picture. And he said, “You know, if Tyre and Sidon had the advantages that Bethsaida and Chorazin had, they would have repented.”

Chorazin, Bethsaida—well, it's going to be hard for you guys on judgment day. "It'll be more bearable"—verse 14—"in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

"And Capernaum," which you might remember was his Galilean base of operations—his hometown. The name itself means it was the hometown of Nahum, the Old Testament prophet. "I mean, you guys think you've got such a rich Jewish heritage; you guys think you're so important; you think you're going to be exalted to heaven because of your background and your pedigree? No. You're going to be brought down to Hades." Why? Because you did not respond rightly to the coming of the King—you didn't repent.

Verse 16—now this seems like a real gear shift here in verse 16, another idea, another thought—he says, "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you"—that's our theme—"rejects me, and the one who rejects me"—the humbled, incarnate God in human form, the one who's shrouding and veiling his divinity—"you're rejecting the one who dwells in unapproachable light—the Father, the one who sent me." So get it clear now: as an emissary of the gospel, I mean, you stand in alliance with me and my Father; and when they reject you, it's no small thing. That's a big thing.

Let's take a look at each of these components—verses 10 and 11, verses 12 through 15, and verse 16—spend most of our time in the first two. But let's do the first one quickly, if we can. Look at verses 10 and 11.

If I am going to keep stepping into the batter's box—to keep talking about Christ, as I did this week and plan to next week, talking to non-Christians about what it means to become a Christian—if I'm going to do that, I need to know when it's time to move on. Now, it's implied here, and it's even stated, I suppose, in verse 10, that when a town does not receive you, the whole idiom—the whole expression—of kicking the dust off your feet and saying, "Well, you came close; the kingdom of God was offered, but I'm moving on," I mean, right out of the gate, there's an expression here that lets me know when it's time to move on, and that is: when they do not receive you.

Let's jot down five things, if we can, about this. First of all, number one: we need to know when to move on. Letter A—these are five subpoints—ready? When they tell you to stop. Right? If I'm going to take "they don't receive you," what does that mean? I'm talking about Christ; I'm talking about the need to repent; I'm talking about the coming kingdom. If you put your hand up and say, "We don't receive this; we don't receive you; stop talking about this," then it's time to

stop talking about this. Pretty simple, isn't it? Doesn't take any, you know, PhD to figure that out. Yeah, if someone tells you to stop, you stop. If they don't receive you, you move on.

Now think that through, if you would. We are always accused as Christians of trying to jam our religion down people's throats. I don't know what you picture; I picture someone at lunch today having food and jamming it down someone's throat, and someone going, "No, no!" Right? That's what I picture. So here's the thing: the first time you tell me, "No, no," okay, then fine—moving on.

Now, put an asterisk by that in your mind and know that sometimes in our biological relationships, this doesn't immediately apply. The context here is sharing with people about Christ, and the assumption is, these are just people in my life. You may have non-Christian children that live in your home; you may have some relationships that you have biologically, and that means that you're going to keep returning to the gospel. But even in those conversations—what I have had in extended family—"Emergenc-," "I don't want to hear about Christianity from you anymore." Then I'm going to back off.

Even in 1 Peter, when it speaks of the Christian wife married to the non-Christian husband, it says, "If your husband's disobedient to the word"—clearly, we're assuming you've talked to him about it; he doesn't want to hear—"you can win him by your behavior." Plan B kicks in. Even in that context, we want to say, "Okay, if someone's putting their hand up, saying, 'I don't want to hear about this,' I'm not going to jam it down your throat." They may say that that's what Christians do. I don't want that ever to be true—not in my life.

You tell me to stop talking about Christ, I'm going to say something like, "Well, the kingdom of God came near to you." The way I like to put it in people's minds is this way: "You won't forget this conversation." I mean, I'm willing to shut up about it if you're telling me you're done and you don't want me to say it. Okay. But this has huge implications about your future. And I've often said it in my evangelism: "A hundred years from now, you will remember this conversation, and I hope it's not the last one you have about Christ."

Very important for us. As the text says—even if they say stop—we do stop. But we try to give them some context and perspective about what a big deal it is, and what they're actually telling us to stop doing.

Letter B—let me turn you to Proverbs real quick. This is a tricky passage; I'd like you to know it—Proverbs chapter 26. I want to give you a second indicator that it's time for you to stop sharing the gospel with a particular person. Number one, if they put their hand up and say, "Stop." A lot of people we talk to are afraid to say that—we have a very wimpy society of people that don't say what they think. And a lot of people will not want you talking about Christ, and they'll never say, "Stop talking to me about this." So you've got to be a bit more discerning. You've got to know, in looking at the conversation you're having with someone about Jesus Christ—heaven and hell, the gospel, what he did for us, what we need to do in response to the gospel—you've got to know when it is that we need to stop that, even when they haven't told us to stop.

And here's the way I'll put it. Let's just—for some context—we'll work through this backwards. Verse 5: this is when the conversation is making progress. Verse 5, "Answer a fool"—quote-unquote—"according to his folly." He says something—as we said last time—it raises up some thought, lofty opinion against the knowledge of God. Hey, answer that, "lest he be wise in his own eyes."

Now, here's the discernment issue. I've got to know if I'm making progress in answering questions, and there's like, "Oh, okay, I get that, I see your position." If I'm really doing things that are beginning to take thoughts captive to Christ—they're being corrected—well then great, answer him.

Now look up in verse 4: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself." See, fools will say a lot of things and chatter a lot of things against reality, against whatever—they'll say things to you. They just chaff on. Don't—you don't want to be like that. If you're not making any progress with this person—and the way I put it, letter B, is this: it's time for me to stop when they stop listening. And I've got to discern that. When has this conversation really ceased making any progress? There's no longer any real enlightenment happening here, and they're not really taking this in. And you'll see this in conversations when bunny trails pick up and people start, you know, deflecting and going into this thing or that thing. Discern, as a Christian: "Listen, it's time for this to come to an end. Clearly, we are not having any progress being made because you've stopped listening."

Turn back a few chapters—Proverbs 23. Let me give you a third one. Proverbs chapter 23, verse 9: "Do not speak in the hearing of a fool"—this is going to clearly be the fool of 26:4, not 26:5—"for he will"—now here's the word I want to focus in on—"despise the good sense of your words." Now, there are some people that stick their fingers in their ears, proverbially, and they don't listen to you anymore. And when you see that they're not listening anymore, it's "Stop."

Stop.” This person’s going to show you there’s a problem by despising the good sense of your words. This Hebrew word can be translated “to scorn, to show derision toward,” even “to mock” is within the realm of this word. They’re bringing back some kind of mocking and derision and disdain toward the things that you’re saying.

So now what you’re hearing back from them is mockery—they’re making fun of it; they’re making light of it. I put it this way: when they start mocking, I need to stop talking. When they tell me to stop, I need to stop talking. When they stop listening, I need to stop talking. And when they start mocking—now I’m done. I’m done.

It’s one of the reasons, by the way, your Facebook evangelism isn’t working out so well. Have you noticed that? You’re putting stuff out there; you’re trying to plow a path to Christ, and people—just, it’s like a magnet for the mockers, is it not? They come out of the woodwork and they just start making fun of it. Listen, I’m not interested in that. I’m not interested in this being a forum for you to mock the truths of God. I’m not going to do that. I’m not going to do that in a situation where that starts erupting—where it gives rise to that. And I’m certainly not going to continue any more in a personal conversation when it turns to mockery.

Proverbs chapter 9—let’s take it one step further. You get another reaction from them that should be clear—it’s time to stop. Proverbs 9, verses 7 and 8. And this sounds a lot like Jesus’s words in Matthew 7 when he says, “Don’t throw your pearls before swine.” And there’s a reason for that. He says because not only will they despise the good sense of your words, but it says they’ll turn on you and attack you. That’s what’s going on here. Verse 7: “Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse.” Now not only will they scoff at the things that you’ve said— that’s a lot like what we just read there; they start mocking you—but look at the next line: “And he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.” That moves from attacking the topic—mocking the topic, disdaining the topic—to now attacking you. Right? In debate, we call that an ad hominem argument. We’re no longer talking about the issues now; we’re calling you a narrow-minded, fundamentalist idiot. We’re now launching our insults at you as a person.

I’ll put it down this way—you haven’t read the whole passage yet—but when they start attacking me, it’s different than the mocking. That’s enough for me to stop. But now they’re going to attack me personally; now they’re going to attack Christians; and the blanket statements and these ad hominem responses about “what a bunch of idiots you are,” whatever— I’m done then. We’re done. I don’t want to give form or give rise to an attack on me or on Christians. Matter of fact, I don’t want you heaping up more judgment on yourself. I’m done. We’re done with this. “Do not reprove”—verse 8 says—“a scoffer, he will hate you for it.” And out of that hatred will come a lot of abuse. “Reprove a wise man”—you think, well, none of my non-Christian contacts

are wise in a biblical sense. They may not be, but God is working toward that conversion, just like he did with Cornelius in his heart. When Peter was sent to talk to Cornelius—here was a guy not yet saved—God had worked in his heart a hunger for truth that makes him a wise man. He's hungry now for the truth of Christ. When you see that, that's great. You can correct that person. You can tear down lofty thoughts raised up against God, and they will love you for it. In the end, it'll be part of their testimony—how you persisted in the conversation and you kept on because the dialogue was being productive.

Know when to move on. It's time to kick the dust off your feet, so to speak—when they tell you to stop, when they stop listening, when they start mocking, and when they start attacking. One more, perhaps the most important one—Proverbs 29, near the end of the book. Proverbs chapter 29, verse 11: “A fool gives full vent to his spirit”—now just even that verb speaks of his anger, okay?—he's just, and he's angry. “But a wise man quietly holds it back.”

So much of Proverbs is about you being able to control your anger. And when people erupt—either with mocking or personal attacks—we need to make sure, I would suggest, that we're done with the conversation; but I need to make sure that my attitude is in check. And I know when my attitude is not in check, and I move from having a calm, reasonable spirit to an angry spirit, then I should be done as well. The fifth one—what is that, letter E—when you get angry. Whenever you get angry, the conversation should be done. It's done. I'm not here in a conversation at an airport or in a taxi cab or anywhere else talking to someone about Christ, and I'm going to continue the conversation when I've moved into the area of anger.

Let me read a text for you that's worth you jotting down—2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 23 through 25. It says, “Have nothing to do with foolish and ignorant controversies.” Now, okay, I don't want to do that; I don't want to get in foolish, ignorant controversies. Well, how would I know that I got there? Well, it's the kind of conversation, it says in the next phrase, that “breeds quarrels.” Well, isn't a foolish controversy and an ignorant controversy—it's a quarrel. Well, I get that. But the idea of the quarrel is that I'm now engaging in kind—the evil and the difficulty that's given toward me, or the mocking or the derision—I'm now starting to return that.

Verse 24 says, “The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome; he must be kind, able to teach, patiently enduring evil.” That means that even when I do get hit with a verbal egg, I'm going to not respond in kind. I'm going to—next verse—“correct my opponents with gentleness.” If I can't do it with gentleness, I'm done. I need to back down, “so that God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” We don't quarrel our way into conversions. We're not going to argue with a kind of red-faced, difficult, angry, quarrelsome spirit. We're not

going to get people into the kingdom that way. Debate is fine—as long as the debate, in the technical sense, means we’re making progress in a dialogue about Christ.

Five indicators: it’s time to stop talking to someone about Christianity—with the asterisk that I know some relationships go beyond the normal conversation of talking to a non-Christian. It could be a family member, or a child, or whatever; and those may continue in one form or another. But on the street, with a friend, with a co-worker—when they tell me to stop, when they stop listening, when they start mocking, when they start attacking, or when I get angry—those things, I need to say, “Hey, I’m moving on.” Doesn’t mean I don’t have an addendum to the conversation, like Jesus said, and that is, “The kingdom of God drew near to you.” “Hey, you’ll remember this conversation.”

And the reason I say it the way I do is because of the next verse in Luke chapter 10, verses 12 through 15. In verse number 12, we get the topic, and the topic is that there’s a lot of consequence to rejecting the gospel that I need to be mindful of. He says—I tell you, Jesus now speaking—“It’ll be more bearable”—underline this now—“on that day.” What day are you talking about? Well, we read it—verse 14—“It’ll be more bearable in the judgment.” There’s a day of judgment that’s coming. In that day of judgment, “it will be more bearable for Sodom than for that town.” What do you call—thinking back to the Galilean towns—“What do you—Bethsaida—for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon”—those notoriously evil, wicked cities and regions of the Old Testament—“they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for the cities out there that reject the message of the gospel. And what about Capernaum—where the Twelve hung out, where Jesus lived—‘You’re going to be exalted to heaven?’ No way. You’ll be brought down to Hades.” Why? Because they neglected to do what Tyre and Sidon would have done—those evil cities—had Christ been in those cities: they would have repented.

This is very uncomfortable, but it’s important for us to recognize that when Jesus talks about us not giving up in our evangelism, because there’s going to be a series of rejections along the way, we need to stop and think about this particular theme and let it really resonate in our own hearts—much like I often quote in Romans 9. It resonated in Paul’s heart, when, in Paul’s heart, he looked at people he had to turn away from in his evangelism, and he said, “My heart grieves over them. God’s my witness; my conscience bears witness—God knows I have unceasing anguish in my heart for them.” Why? Because they’re not saved. It hurt him; it grieved him.

Number two on your outline: let’s spend time regularly letting that happen in our hearts, as unpleasant as it is. Number two: you need to grieve the cost of their rejection. Grieve the cost of

their rejection. And when you do, it will keep you from being the kind of flippant person that knocks the dust off your feet and goes, “Hey, ah, nice try; I guess you don’t want to go to heaven—big deal—moving on.” You won’t have a flippant, dismissive attitude. You’ll have an attitude of grieving.

Paul had to turn away from his kinsmen according to the flesh—his Jewish brothers. He did in Acts 13 when he said, “If you’re going to thrust the word aside, we’re going to go to the Gentiles.” But when he contemplates that, as he writes the book of Romans, he says, “I’m grieving in my heart. I have unceasing anguish and sorrow in my heart” over their rejection. That’ll keep us going back into the batter’s box, saying, “I’ve got to keep at this; I’m going to continue on.”

Judgment is a real thing. It’s an unpleasant thing. But it’s the reality of what we’re doing. We are offering—quote-unquote—“salvation.” Think about that. We’re trying to save people from the consequences of their sins.

It would be like you being on a big ship that’s going down and sinking, and you’re running up and down the hallways, banging on the stateroom doors, saying, “You’ve got to go—we’ve got to get off—this ship is going down.” I thought about that analogy when I watched the recent documentary on the Costa Concordia. Does that ring a bell—that name of that ship? It sank there in the northern Mediterranean. It had just spent the day docked in Italy, and people took the trains and the buses up to Rome, and they came back that night; they got on the ship. And as they started sailing back toward the Mediterranean—the main channel of the Mediterranean—along the coast there of Italy, they hit this reef and tore like a 120-foot gash into the hull of the ship, and it started going down.

The interesting thing about that—if you study what happened with the Costa Concordia—that sounds a lot like the Titanic, right? A ship that people thought could not be sunk. Here’s what was on the intercom—the PA system. The guys up in the bridge of the ship were telling everybody on the ship, “No problems, ladies and gentlemen,” because what had happened when it tore the hull and everything started to flood in the hold of this big gigantic ship (it’s a subsidiary of Carnival Cruise Lines—this is a big cruise ship; it had like 3,000, almost 4,000 people on the ship), when it started to sink and all that water came in, it caused all these electrical shortages and all the lights went out, and they were just saying over the intercom, “Don’t worry, don’t—anybody—we’re just having an electrical malfunction, so everybody just go back to your staterooms. Everything is fine.”

Well, the ship starts to list, which usually doesn't happen when, you know, your breaker goes off in the electrical room, right? So here's the ship; it's starting to list, and people are starting to recognize that while everybody on the speaker—as much like in Jeremiah, as they were saying “Peace, peace”—“It's no big deal; God loves everyone, and everyone will be alright on this big ship called life. It's okay, don't worry—God loves us; love wins—it'll be fine.” The ship is listing, and people start recognizing, “No, we're going down.”

The great documentary I saw—there have been several of them that have been made—but the people started to realize, “I don't care what they say on the intercom; I've got to go up and down these hallways and start getting people to the muster station to get on those lifeboats.”

Now, let me take that illustration and just spend a few minutes here—you thought we had a lot of subpoints on number one; let me give you six on number two—reasons that we can think reasonably about God's judgment. This is something that grieves our hearts, and yet, we should, as Christians, say this is the reasonable, right reaction of God. Let me give you six reasons. Ready?

Number one: because the passengers caused the problem. Let's give you an illustration: the passengers drilled holes in the hull of the ship. Picture that now. Water starts flooding in. Okay, so the ship is sinking; it's starting to list. And it wasn't because we hit a reef; it's because the passengers were actively engaged in drilling holes into the hull of the ship. People have caused the problem; the passengers caused the problem.

One of the reasons it would seem reasonable for God to let people sink in this boat called life is because they are guilty for the problem that causes the ship to sink. As it says in Romans chapter 3, verse 23 (that we all learned as little kids, I hope—and if not, you're teaching your kids this verse and you're learning it yourself), it makes very clear that all people have sinned—or let's put it this way: everyone has drilled holes in the hull of the ship called life. Everyone has done it, and we've all fallen short of the glory of God. That issue needs to be crystal clear in our minds—Romans 3:23: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Now, you say, “Well, I don't think that this sin or that sin should be worthy of God's judgment; this should not really threaten the integrity of this ship called life—we shouldn't be judged for this.” Do you think that conversation is going on in modern society? “God shouldn't be mad at that; God should be okay with this.” Okay, here's the second reason it is right and reasonable for God to judge people that reject the gospel. Here goes:

Number two: it's God's ship. It's God's ship. Gotcha? God—because it's his ship—has what I like to call “jurisdiction” over everyone on the ship. It's not your ship; it's God's ship. You didn't even pay to get on the ship—you were born on the ship. And being born on the ship, there's a captain of the ship, and the captain of the ship is guiding the ship. And he's not responsible for this ship listing and sinking—you're responsible for it. “Well, I thought it was our parents, Adam and Eve.” Yeah, they got the ball rolling. Everyone else is culpable and involved and participating in the sinking of the ship.

And I can't say, “Well, I should be able to drill through the hull of the ship with impunity; I don't know why I'm judged for this.” Because the captain says this: you want to get a drill and drill into that—you've just had some room service; you bought a pie at room service; you want to drill into your pie—do it all night long; drill into your pie, and there'll be no problems with the ship. But if you want to go to the bottom of the ship and start drilling through the hull of the ship, there will be consequences for that. “Well, who gets to make those rules?” The one who has jurisdiction—the one whose ship it is.

That's why, when Paul rolls into Athens in Acts 17 and starts talking to the intellectual elites of the day, he starts with this: “God made the world and everything in it.” He starts with that, because the maker of the ship—the captain of the ship—is, as the text says, the giver of life and breath and everything else. Now you've got people you talk to that are passengers on the ship called life, but they don't recognize—perhaps as they try to make their own rules that they think shouldn't be judged and “this one could be judged”—“I think these rules are out of bounds; I don't know what the Bible says.” They don't have the jurisdiction. I love that word: *juris* (Latin word—law), *diction* (to speak). Someone has the right to speak the laws, and it ain't you. It's not you. You do not have the right to make up the rules. If God says, “You know, you can't stand on your head because you'll go to hell for standing on your head”—well, God could make a rule like that if he wanted to. He's made rules for a lot of things regarding what is moral behavior and immoral behavior. God has the right; he has the jurisdiction. He's the captain of the ship. You were born on it. You didn't pay for it. You showed up here. He put you on this planet, gave you life, breath, and everything else; and he says, “Don't do this; don't do that; do this; don't do that.” Great. Those are his rules.

Now, here's the problem: we all find ourselves with the drill in our hands, drilling through the hull, saying, “Oh, we've all sinned”—Romans 3:23—all fall short of the glory of God. Here's the third thing you need to know—the reason it is reasonable for God to allow judgment in people's lives. Why? Because he's provided lifeboats.

Number three: he's provided lifeboats, and there are lifeboats for every single passenger on the ship. They're all there. All the orange lifeboats are all lined up. All you have to do is get to the muster station and step on the lifeboat. The lifeboat will do all the work for you—just transfer from this ship to that lifeboat. That's all you've got to do. And God graciously provides them—that's why Christ came. We need a human buoyancy machine—the righteousness of Christ—for me to navigate to safety; that has to be someone else's righteousness. God has provided the righteousness. He says, "Just get in the boat. Get in the boat and trust the boat, and you can get off this sinking ship."

Now, not only that, number four: he's provided messengers. Messengers—there are messengers now that, despite the announcement over the loudspeaker—"Don't worry, ladies and gentlemen; we just had a little short electrical problem; things will be fine"—there are people running down the hallways, banging on your stateroom door, saying, "Hey, we're sinking; get to your muster station; get into the lifeboat; you need the lifeboat or you're going to die." There are people saying that. Not only that—that would be, by the way, Romans chapter 10, verse 15—there are people that are bringing the message that brings people to salvation. It's a clear path off the sinking ship called life.

"What about the people that didn't hear it clearly? What about the people in Sidon and Tyre?" Listen, here's the thing: there's something else that Romans chapter 2, verse 15, says that is also a messenger of salvation. It's called your conscience. It's just like the person sitting there who's now going to drown on the Costa Concordia, saying, "No one came down my hallway and knocked on my door and told me to get into the lifeboat." Well, you know when your pie that you ordered slid off the table and your cabin was now listing at 45 degrees—did it give you any hints that we had a problem on this ship? "Well, no one said to go; I was just listening to the speaker and it said everything's fine—it's just an electrical short; everything will be fine; this is an unsinkable ship." Well, you may have heard that; that may have been the refrain of the culture every day—"Don't worry; God loves you; everything will be fine." As Jeremiah said, people will say that in the name of God til Christ comes back—"Peace, peace," when there is no peace. You need salvation. That's called your conscience—Romans chapter 2, verse 15.

There are two categories of messengers: the evangelists—the people that come with the message to get to the muster station and get on the lifeboat—and there is a tilting ship; that should be evidence enough for everyone. It says it so clearly in Romans chapters 1 and 2—it says that people that don't get to the lifeboats are "without excuse." Without excuse. You don't need a clear message from a pulpit, from some seminary-trained pastor, to say, "Well, I didn't know." Everyone is without excuse because of a thing called conscience.

We drilled holes in the ship; it's not our ship; God provided lifeboats; there are messengers. Let's just get to the heart of the matter now. It's just for God to let people sink. It's just—just—the punishment of God, in a sinking ship that you caused to sink, is just—to let that happen to you. It's the right thing.

You've rejected the message of getting to the muster station and getting in the lifeboat and sailing to safety. You've rejected that—whether it was a constant knocking on the door by some irritating passenger that said, "Come on, let's go," who opened the door and tried to drag you down the hall, or whether it was just the ship—when everything on your table slid onto the floor, you had enough to know you should have run to the mercy of God for help, but you didn't. And because you caused the problem and you didn't respond to conscience, or you didn't respond to the message of the gospel, it is right for God to let you sink.

So much so that in the book of Revelation, the Bible says that the perfect, eternal perspective of angels who look at this world as they pour out the bowls, so to speak, of wrath on the final generation on this planet—they will look to God and say, "They deserved it. They deserve it." No one is going to shake their fist at God and say, "This isn't right." It's absolutely right.

So much so that God has provided something great—if you get in the lifeboat and you sail to the kingdom, he's offered you everything; and if you want to reject him and his call to get you to safety, then he will reject you. That's only fair.

It's the reason you pay 10 or 11 bucks to go to the movies and watch the shoot 'em up movies. You know that, right? You watch those shoot 'em up movies and you sit there, eat your popcorn, and when that guy gets his head blown off you go, "Yeah!" And then you say, "Oh, I'm a Christian; I'm supposed to be about love and forgiveness and peace, and I guess I shouldn't feel that way—but... yeah." Why do you do that? Why do you do that? Because there's something visceral in your heart that connects to the divinity of God himself that says, "Bad guys should be punished; good guys should win." And on a screen—even when it's bloody and gross and movies you probably shouldn't be watching anyway—and you cheer at those. It's because it's connected in your own heart to the justice of God.

And when the bad—no one would buy a ticket to a movie where the bad guys don't—where there's not that sense, that visceral sense of resolution—"Bad guys got burned; they got blown up; they got their heads blown off." "Great—great movie! I probably shouldn't tell my pastor I went to see it, but it was great." Why was it so great? Because there was a resolve in your

heart—justice was served. You saw, by the director, the badness of the bad; you saw how bad it was; and then you're like, "Them getting blown up." I've given you this illustration way too many times. But you see, if God is not a God who resolves things in terms of justice—whether it be on people that sinned against him or Christ on the cross—then he's not a just God. He's not a just God. He's not a good God. He's not a good God; then he cannot be God at all.

And the way I try to illustrate that with you endlessly—and I'm sorry, ad nauseam—it's that illustration of me running for judge in Orange County: "Vote for me," and I say—I will never get elected if my slogan is "Vote for me—all go free." If you heard me say that: "Vote for me—everybody goes free." "Why are you running on that campaign slogan?" "Because I'm going to be the loving judge. I'm going to be the loving judge you want to vote for. Are you not into love? Well, my campaign slogan is 'Love wins'—that's my main slogan—love wins. Everybody who comes before my tribunal—'Love you, man.'" "Yeah, well, I just—I just raped your sister." "It's okay; I love you, man; I love you. Here comes my gavel—you're free—set free—you are free." "Why?" "Because I love you—loving judge."

No. If you know the details of the case—you serve on the jury and you watch the facts—if you see the judge do that, I don't care what he says—if that gavel does not come down and say "Guilty," you say, "He's not a good judge." I can't run on the campaign slogan that you should vote for me as a judge in Orange County if my slogan is "I'm going to be the loving judge who lets everybody go free."

Problem is, we just don't want to see ourselves as guilty. The goal of the messengers is to go into the cities and the villages and tell people, "We've got a problem—the problem is sin. It makes us guilty before God. You drill holes in the hull of the ship. It was God's ship; he's got the right to make the rules. He's a loving enough captain to provide a lifeboat for everyone—just go and get it. Respond to the message of conscience and of the gospel—get in the boat. And if you don't do it, and you drown on the ship, blood's on your own head." That's the picture here.

One more thing that may help you that I must point out—I said there were six. Here's the sixth one. Take a look carefully at verse 12 again: "I tell you"—Luke 10:12—"it will be"—underline these two words—"more bearable on that day"—what day? On the future day of judgment—"for Sodom than for that town." That future day—yeah, "bearable," "more bearable." What does that mean? Well, that means that Sodom is going to get off lighter than the town in southern Judea that didn't respond to the 72 messengers with their message and the affirmation with the healing that they did, according to verse 9. If they don't respond to that—worse off for them.

Number six: punishment is not the same for everyone. That's important. Punishment is not the same for everyone. And this is where my illustration breaks down, right? If you drowned, you drowned. That's not how punishment works. As a matter of fact, you look at the word "Sodom," or in verse 13 "Tyre and Sidon," and all those cities got overthrown. If you look at Sodom, for instance, it was notoriously overthrown when God rained down fire on that city and destroyed it. Now the question is: did God judge the city? Most of us would say, "Yeah." But the text says there's a day coming for Sodom. What? Yeah, there's a future day coming for Sodom, and they're going to have a judgment—with a capital J. That's in the future. And that will not be the same as it is for whatever city you're going to in Judea, or Chorazin, or Bethsaida, or Capernaum, or Tyre and Sidon. They're all going to be judged differently. And, want to get more specific? Every person in that town is going to be judged differently based on two things—want two subpoints? How many holes you drilled in the hull of the ship—that's going to be one. And how loud the volume was in the message to get you to a lifeboat. Those are the two things you'll be judged on.

You'll be judged on two things: how did you live your life? How many sinful things did you do? How much wrath did you store up against yourself for the day of God's wrath? That's Romans chapter 2, verse 5. And then it says, the next verse, you'll be judged—verse 6—"according to your works." So—how many holes you drilled.

And the whole argument then that goes on in chapter 2 of Romans: you had conscience; you had creation. How about message? Depending on the amount of the message—the volume of the message—will determine how much judgment you get, which is exactly what's going on here. Whose sin was worse—Chorazin, Bethsaida, or Sodom? Sodom was way worse. Yeah, they'll be judged lighter than Chorazin and Bethsaida. Why? Because they had a louder volume—a more clear, articulate call to come to the lifeboat—and they rejected it. That's very important, because in my mind, if you think like a lot of people—"Well, judgment is the same for everyone"—then I'm thinking, "Wow, this doesn't seem fair at all." God is very fair when it comes to judgment—very fair. He's a God that judges according to each man's work and what kind of call they had to get to the lifeboat.

"Well, I hope no one knocked on their cabin door." Don't forget the listing of the ship—everyone has conscience and creation that should be very clearly calling them to a place in their own hearts of needing to reach out in repentance to God and throw themselves on his mercy for salvation.

Punishment—oh, by the way, I should make one little note here as long as we're in this passage; it's very helpful. If you're an annihilationist, this passage annihilates your annihilationism.

Clearly—why? “More bearable.” But let’s just start this way: Sodom—if they got judged way back then, 2,000 years before Christ (about 2200 BC)—if they got judged then, then there would be no future judgment for them. And yet the New Testament is very clear: “It is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment.” They may have been judged with a fiery fireball 2,000 years before Christ—well, that was judgment with a small “j.” But their big judgment is before the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of time—then they’ll come and answer for their deeds.

That’s very important for me to recognize as something that says, “Well, they weren’t annihilated when they died,” and then the annihilationist says, “Well, they’ll just be brought up standing before the Great White Throne, and then they’ll be annihilated—then being thrown out like it’s just annihilation.” I want to know—that whole thing about “more bearable.” It says it in verse number 14 and verse number 12—“Hey, you cease to exist in a more unbearable way than you cease to exist.” It doesn’t make any sense. If there is no existence for the lost—which is the mediating position between “love wins” and biblical Christianity—“Well, people just, they just stop; cease to exist”—then this passage makes no sense.

Of course, there is a judgment to come. It will be a conscious—not only conscious, but a bodily—experience. Paul said there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust, and they will face God; and in their bodily physical form, in which they were created to live, in a body that’s impervious to dying, they will either be in a place of blessing or a place of judgment. That judgment will be just, and it will not be the same for everyone. God is fair—based on how many holes you drilled in the hull of the ship, and how clear and at what volume that call to get to the lifeboat was.

One last thing quickly—verse 16: “The one who hears you hears me.” Well, that’s not what we’ve been talking about. Okay, we’ll flip it over—“The one who rejects you rejects me.” Okay, yeah, that happens. “And the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” So let’s just be clear in your Jewish minds: the biggest, most holy, majestic, powerful, intimidating Being in the universe just got rejected when you—a person I don’t even know your name, just recorded in the Bible as a group of 72 people—walk into a town and say, “Repent—Christ is coming; the kingdom of heaven is drawing near.” If they say, “I don’t want to hear that,” they mock you, call you names, attack you—they have rejected the infinite, eternal God.

Number three: you need to realize God’s share in your evangelism. You need to see God’s participation personally in your evangelism. You need to see that God stands in solidarity with you when you share the gospel—asterisk, footnote: God stands in solidarity with you only

insofar as you are in solidarity with the real gospel message. And let me make that clear: he only stands in solidarity with you insofar as the message that you're sharing is biblical.

Jot this down—you should know it—2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 3 through 5, says this: “There will come a day when people will no longer put up with sound doctrine.” Now I know this is a passage about a preacher preaching to people in his culture, but certainly as he ends this, he speaks of evangelism. And it's clear there'll be a time when people don't want to hear the message of heaven and hell and repentance and sin and all of that stuff. And I think we've passed that station like two stations back, right? We are well into that period. And so it says—I'll read it for you—“having itching ears,” they will not give up on Christianity and religion altogether—there will be a religious future, a religionless future—what is it? I can't even say it clearly—listen, say it: they'll gather and accumulate teachers for themselves—teachers that will tell them what they want to hear, that will suit their own passions. See, it's not that the world's ever going to be devoid of religion; it's just that biblical Christianity will be edged out because increasingly people will say, “Tell me what I want to hear.” We'll bear the banner “Christian”—we'll say it's the gospel—but it won't be the gospel. He says they'll “turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.” So you be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist—an evangelist has to be faithful to the message.

And if you are faithful to the message—only two encouraging passages. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 20, says this—I know you know the verbiage of the first phrase: “We are ambassadors for Christ.” Here's the next phrase: “for God is making his appeal through us.” That's a great line. I'm an ambassador of Christ, and this week, even this afternoon, I go and share the gospel with someone—it is as though God makes his appeal through me. Now that is true only insofar as I'm faithful to the gospel message. And I have to be faithful to the message; but when I am, it's as though God's speaking to that person.

Acts chapter 7, verse 51—I add this one because it's a situation where Stephen and his evangelistic efforts are being rejected. He's being rejected, and he's about to be attacked and killed. And in that moment before that attack, he says, “You're a stiff-necked people; you have uncircumcised hearts and ears,” which is a spiritual, metaphorical way to say, “You don't want to hear the truth of the gospel. You always resist”—preachers know; evangelists know—“you always resist the Holy Spirit.” That's a big statement, right? “You're not receiving my message; man, you are always in the pattern of resisting the Spirit.” That's a big claim. Here's Stephen saying, “I'm in solidarity with the message; therefore I know I'm in solidarity with the Triune God.” Just as Jesus says in this passage: “You reject the person that I send; you reject me. You reject me; you reject the Father.” In this passage—“You reject the message of the messenger; you reject the Spirit.” You've got the Triune God completely rejected when someone faithful to the message presents it to a non-Christian, and they say, “I'm done with you; I don't want to hear.”

One passage on this—1 Thessalonians chapter 2—would you turn there, please? 1 Thessalonians 2—let's end with this text. Both the positive and negative are stated in the book of 1 Thessalonians about receiving or disregarding the truths that Paul brought to these people. As he instructs them in this book, he looks back to their conversion. He says this in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13. He describes his evangelism, and he says, "We thank God constantly for this." For what? "That when you received the word of God, which you heard from us"—there's someone faithful to the message; we're giving you the biblical message—"you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is." "What, did he just read from the Bible?" No—he spoke it in his own words. But when he spoke the true message of the gospel, they received it for what it really was—the word of God.

Do you realize the magnitude and the honor you have this week to speak to non-Christians about the gospel? You are speaking as though God were speaking directly to them. God makes his appeal through you. And if they receive it—that's the great thing about the powerful word of God—living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword—when people receive that, it says, it goes to work in them. Love that—"what it really is"—the word of God, "which is at work in you believers." It transforms their lives. Our message—no. Our words—no. I mean, they are our words; but when we recommend and promote and articulate and apply and explain and define the gospel, it goes to work in people's lives.

Now, with that in view, turn ahead to chapter 4—1 Thessalonians. He now suggests the other side of the coin. After—if you glance at the first seven verses—he speaks to them about Christian sexual ethics. He ends with this statement—verse 8: "Therefore, whoever disregards this"—you want to reject this—"you disregard not man," not my words, my opinions, not my authority—"you disregard God." And if you're a Christian, you're disregarding the one who gave you the Spirit. That's a powerful statement.

Let me just apply it this way: I've been teaching you and instructing you about evangelism. I'm ending this sermon by saying, "Get out there into this world." And you will have the solidarity of God himself, who speaks to non-Christians through you—not in any mystical way. You stick to the message of the gospel, and God will make his appeal through those people. And if they respond to it, it'll do all kinds of work in their lives because God will connect with them and he'll change them.

I've been teaching—now this is the third sermon; I close this series—about you getting out there to do it. We just apply this verse now—verse 8: if what I'm telling you is biblical, if what I've

been teaching here for the last three weeks about your requirement—and I know you’ve heard it before, and it’s probably one of those uncomfortable sermon series: “I’ve got to go out and be embarrassed and scared and share the gospel”—if what I’m saying to you is biblical, and you don’t get up to speed with us and you don’t start applying these sermons and do what the Bible clearly—well, you judge; you’d be a good Berean—clearly, in my mind, calls you to be—an ambassador for Christ; and you refuse for another week to speak up for Christ—understand: you’re not disregarding Pastor Mike; you’re not disregarding the hardcore Christians at Compass; you’re not disregarding the church of the 21st century. You are disregarding and being completely disobedient to the God who gave you his Spirit. That’s big.

I didn’t mean to end on that heavy note, but as I read this text, I thought, “Yeah—it’s not just evangelism where God speaks; it’s the instruction about evangelism in which God speaks.” Got to get out and share the gospel with people. You’re going to strike out. And when you do, and people reject you, don’t run home and say, “I’m not doing that anymore.” Remember Babe Ruth in 1923—more strikeouts than anyone and more home runs than anyone.

And, by the way, anybody you look at—I mean, you can see those stories; just look it up on the internet—all the “successful failures,” or whatever. I mean, I’ve used the illustration of Abraham Lincoln—you know how many times he failed before he succeeded? I mean, that’s just how it goes, because they’re persistent. I mean, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates—all these super-rich—look at their failures in their lives. And the thing about it is they kept at it. I mean, Disney—fired because he lacked imagination. Marilyn Monroe—fired because she wasn’t pretty enough, right? You know these stories—look them up. And yet, they’re known for things that they succeeded in, and they succeeded because they didn’t give up when they were rejected.

I don’t care if you’re the most beautiful, smart, rich person in the world—it doesn’t matter; I don’t really care about that. But if you care whether or not, in the harvest field of Christ, you’re out there and participating in the harvest, you’re never going to be fruitful in that endeavor if you don’t learn to encounter, navigate, weather the rejection you’re going to receive.

So let’s do that. Just say, “Okay, it’s going to happen.” Let’s get back in the batter’s box every time with a biblical, ambitious optimism—that what we have in our mouths is “the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.”

Let’s pray: God, help us to not be afraid of striking out in conversations—to be willing to be rejected—because we’re not going to sit there and jam anything down anybody’s throat. We’re

done when they're done. We may add that sobering statement, that they will remember this conversation. And, as I like to say, I hope it's not your last conversation about Christ, because if it is, this will be a bad memory for you; because for those that have had the gospel clearly presented to them, there's a greater responsibility, a greater culpability, a greater judgment for them.

God, we know there's a lot at stake. We are living on a sinking, listing ship. God, I know it seems almost this fanatical picture of someone running down the hallways, banging on stateroom cabin doors—and of course that's not the frantic kind of evangelism that we do—but it is the feeling in our hearts of urgency. There is a brokenheartedness, I hope, as Romans 9 says, when people close their door—their cabin door—and say, “I'm going to ignore the listing; I'm going to listen to the announcement on the speaker; I'm not going to head to the lifeboat.” It's okay—our hearts break over that like Jesus did.

It may sound dismissive because they're knocking dust off their sandals and moving on, but that clearly was not the heart of Christ—to just dismissively move on. Like Paul, there's a lot of grief in that. Jesus would look at them and say, “Look at them—they're like sheep without a shepherd.” He'd say, on a separate occasion, “I wish I could gather them like a hen does her chicks—but they wouldn't have it.” They just wouldn't get in the lifeboat.

So help us, God, please, to be the kinds of compassionate people that are persistent in our evangelism. And sometimes we need to move on from a particular person or conversation, but let us never give up our desire and our fire to share the message of good news—the message that changes people's lives—the message that is the power of God unto salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.