Exploring and Proclaiming the Depths of Scripture
FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

Gospel Crazy – Part 1
Sold Out for Its Advancement

Pastor Mike Fabarez

The writer of Proverbs 30 confesses in verse 18 that there are some things in this world he just does not understand—things that just don't compute for him. Literally, he says, they're too amazing for me. On his short list, number four, he says, "I don't understand what happens to people when they fall in love." He says, "I don't get it." Literally, he says, "I don't understand the way of a man with a maiden." Clearly lost some Monday Night Football buddies to some romance. He says, "You know, they go crazy."

And it's true, right? I mean, it's odd what love does to people. It is—you know, we say they're crazy in love, those crazy lovebirds. You know, if you have a teenage daughter, you might say she's boy crazy, right? The teenage son who hasn't cleaned his room in 10 years is in the driveway picking the lint off the floor mats of his car because he's going to pick up a girl, you know. What happened to this guy?

You've got the guy with zero creativity, right? The guy can't draw a stick man, and he becomes playwright, actor, artist—you know. He becomes this super creative guy to ask one simple question of the girl that he loves: "Will you marry me?" Right? I mean, I hear these stories, and he's like, "He did that? You're kidding me. What's happened to this guy?"

The writer of Proverbs says, "I don't get it." People go nuts, fall in love.

The Bible says as Christians, there ought to be something akin to that that takes place in our lives when we become Christians. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 puts it this way. If you have your Bibles, this would be a good one to look at. We'll look at several passages this morning, and we'll eventually get here to Romans chapter 1, but here's a great statement that helps us understand where we're headed this morning.

When Paul talks about his passion for the gospel, his desire, his craziness, if you will, about people getting right with God, he says it this way, 2 Corinthians 5. Look with me at verse number 14. I mean, to put it simply, he says, "Christ's love compels us." I mean, we're forced, we're constrained by the love of Christ.

Both, I think, as we see in 1 Corinthians—his love for Christ and Christ's love for him—it's just, it's intoxicating. It does things to him that the world looks at and says, "You're crazy." Matter of fact, look up in the verse in front of it. He says, "If we're out of our minds, it is for God's sake." I mean, if you think we're nuts, because we're living for God—well, what's your concern?

Middle of verse 14: "The love of Christ compels us because we're convinced that one died for all"—that's Christ—"and therefore all died." Now, I know that's hard to compute on the surface, but we're heading toward verse 17, those very familiar verses right there, where "if anyone's in Christ, new creation, the old is gone and the new has come."

When we get the fact that Christ died for us and there is that transaction of his life for mine, my life for his—I mean, it's like my old person's gone. It's a whole new person, someone brand new.

He says, "And he died for all"—by the way, verse 15—here's the craziness of my life, Paul says—"that those who live should no longer live for themselves but we got to live for him who died for them and was raised again."

Now all of this is going to lead to his discussion about how he is commissioned with the message of the gospel. He says in verse 18, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men's sins against him and he is committed now to us," he says, "the message of reconciliation." That's the message we have.

Therefore, verse 20, "we are Christ's ambassadors." As though God were making his appeal through us, "we implore you on Christ's behalf." Implore—that's a big word. We don't use it very much anymore. But we're begging you with passion. We're calling out to you. Here comes the message: "Be reconciled to God." We're just passionate about that message.

And then what a great summation of it all. We've looked at this many times—even in our last series, verse 21: "God made him who had no sin"—that's Christ, the sinless one, the innocent one—"to be sin for us." God treated him as though he were the sinner on the cross so that in him, if we trust in him, "we might become the righteousness of God."

That message right there—got to get it out. We're going to implore people to get reconciled to God. That's the message of the gospel. And he says in verse 14, it's the love of Christ that compels us.

And it's not just love for Christ, by the way. It is a concern for people. The whole paragraph, the whole concept started in verse number 10. Let's catch a little bit of that context. He says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."
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"Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

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That's the message we have. Therefore, verse 20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

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You see, when you really get what it is to love Christ, and you get really to the place where you comprehend the exchange that took place—when you say, "My life for yours, your life for mine"—the world should look at you and say, "Boy, that guy's nuts." It's part of what happens.

And if you want to be really specific, the reason they're going, "He's off his rocker. He's a little different. He's a little strange. He's a little over the top," is because of the message of reconciliation. Because you can't stop telling people, "Be reconciled to God."

Romans chapter 1

Romans chapter 1. If you have your Bibles, turn there. We're going to spend the next five weeks looking at the first 17 verses of the book of Romans. In the first 17 verses, we see the longest, on record in the New Testament at least, introduction to an epistle. So it's the longest one.

And it's an introduction that not only sets up the message of the book, which begins in verse 18, but it also gives us a window into Paul's heart. We get to see what the Apostle Paul is all about. And what comes through loud and clear in this text is he's on fire for the message of the gospel. He sees himself as an emissary, an ambassador of this message. He's all about the gospel.

He is, from a lot of people's perspective, crazy about this message. If he's out of his mind, it's for this. It's for God. It's because the love of Christ compels him. And he's all about saying to people, "Get right with God."

He's going to spend the longest book he wrote in the New Testament talking about the gospel. And it starts with one simple statement in verse number one where he describes himself. And that's all we'll cover this morning.

And I know that's scary to some of you. One verse—433 verses in the book. I figured it out with holidays and a couple vacation weeks. That's about nine and a half years. But we're going to go a lot faster than that. It's just the first verse, okay? Seventeen verses, five weeks, and we're going to be moving. We're just trucking through the book of Romans.

But verse 1 today is all we can digest because it's his opening statement about who he sees himself to be. Here's who I am.

Starts with his name, verse 1: Paul. Which is interesting, by the way, because that wasn't the name he heard his mama calling for dinner when he was a kid, right? That wasn't the name that his dad sat around and picked out for him when he was being born. "Well, I know. We'll call him…" What was his name? Saul. See, that was his given name.

But that's not how he opens the book. He opens his book with the name we know him by, which is a break with his old life. And then he describes himself.

"Well, I just need to let you know—Paul, the new guy—I am a servant of Christ Jesus. I'm not who I was before. Now I'm a servant of Christ, and I'm called by God to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. This is my identity. I'm set apart for this message. That's why I live now."

I hope we can work through all the excuses that will flood into our minds in the next five weeks and come away a month or so from now and say, "That's what I've got to be much more like in my life." And it starts with you thinking rightly about yourself and the message of the gospel.

Paul, not Saul. Saul was who he used to be.

Now, this was a pattern in the New Testament, which, by the way, became a pattern in church history, that when you became a Christian, you got a new name. And it was a little bit of a bummer, I suppose, for parents who kind of, you know, worked on the name real hard. But they got a different name because they were a different person, just like we saw in 2 Corinthians 5—new creation, all died, the old guy's gone, I'm a new creation—new name.

He gets converted in Acts 9. By Acts 13, they're calling him Paul now. He's all about a new life, a new direction, a new focus.

And church history used to be that way. If you became a Christian in the ninth century, you might have in your church been given a new name.

Matter of fact, it's a whole different sermon, but there's an interesting statement in Revelation about getting a new name. Save that one. I didn't mention that in the other two services. I shouldn't have brought it up now, but the point is: new name, new direction, new name, new life.

New name—I'm not who I used to be.

And Paul used to explain this change in his life all the time in the book of Acts, and it is interesting that three times we see an explanation, a testimony of Paul being turned from Saul to Paul.

Look at one of them, Acts chapter 26. It's the last time he went over it in the book, but he describes—in this case, in one of his many trials, dragged before authorities of the city—in this case Caesarea, the Roman headquarters of the Mediterranean coast—Acts chapter 26—he is now describing how he went from Saul to Paul.

And in that, I think, is a motivation for what he's going to do by the time we get to the end of this chapter, which is be crazy about the gospel.

Acts chapter 26

Acts chapter 26. Let's start in verse number 4. He's standing here before King Agrippa. Is that what your Bible says in the first three verses? You know who that is, don't you? We went through this not long ago. That's Herod the Great who killed all those kids in Judea. That's his great-grandson. I mean, his grandfather was the one that killed and beheaded John the Baptist. He's got a bad track record.

His dad is killing the apostles early on and imprisoning them in the first part of the book of Acts. And now, Paul's turn to meet great-grandson of the nemesis of Christ in Matthew chapter 2.

So now you're dragged in to talk to him. Festus is great. Talk to the king. So here he comes—Paul—circumstance—standing before the king—and he starts discussing his old life.

Verse number 4, he says, "All the Jews know the way I lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem, because he came there to study because he wanted to be a Pharisee. Verse 5: 'They've known me for a long time, and they can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. I was all about Judaism. I was all about living the way I thought the Jewish rabbis thought I should live. I wanted to do Old Testament Judaism the way it's supposed to be done. And so I listened to the culture. I was a Pharisee.'

"And now it is because of my hope in what God promised our fathers that I'm on trial today. I'm just bringing Old Testament theology to its logical conclusion. Now, they don't like that. They're mad at me about it. He says, 'But this is the promise that our twelve tribes were hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. That's what the Old Testament was all about. O King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?' which was the touchstone for getting him imprisoned in the first place.

"He says, 'I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. I was fighting this thing just like these guys were. Verse 10: And that is just what I did. I did it in Jerusalem. And on the authority of the chief priests, I put many of the saints, many of those Christian guys, in prison. And they were put to death, and I even cast my vote against them when they were put to death. Many a time, verse 11 says, I went from one synagogue where these Christians were gathering to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I, that is Saul, right, that's what he's known as, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.'

"And on one of those journeys, verse 12, 'I was going to Damascus with the authority and the commission of the chief priests. And at about noon, O King, when I was on that road, I saw a light from heaven. It was brighter than the sun, and it was blazing around me and my companions. And we all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Hmm. And it's hard for you to kick against the goads. I know you're fighting this.'

"He says, 'Then I asked, Who are you, sir?' Literally, that's—use the word *kurios* there—'Sir, who are you?' 'Well, I'm Jesus, whom you're persecuting. You're picking on my people. You're picking on me. You're persecuting them. You're persecuting me,' the Lord replied.

"'Now Saul,' he says, 'get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you. Now here's where Romans chapter 1, verse 1 comes in—to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you've seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you—because that's not going to go over well with people, which is now as he stands before King Agrippa—I'll rescue you from your own people, the Jews, and from the Gentiles. And I'm sending you to them. Here's the reason you're going with this message: to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power, the grip, the enslavement to Satan, to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are set apart, who are sanctified, who are made holy by faith in me.'

"So, King Agrippa, 'I did not prove disobedient to the vision from heaven. I did what Christ was telling me to do. He turned me around, first to those in Damascus, and then to those in Jerusalem, and all those in Judea, and to the Gentiles also. I preach that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That's why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I've had God's help to this very day, and I stand here to testify to both small and great alike. I'm saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen. I'm just carrying out Old Testament theology to its logical extreme—that the Christ would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and he would proclaim light to his own people, the Jewish people, and to the Gentiles.'

"At this point, Festus interrupted Paul's defense, and he said—we'll see this a lot in this series, people saying this about people that are proclaiming the gospel, underline it—'You are out of your mind, Paul. You're crazy.' He shouted it. He said, 'Your great learning is driving you insane. You've lost it.'

"'I'm not insane,' at least not how you think I am. I may be crazy for the gospel, but I'm telling you, he says, what is true and reasonable. 'I'm not insane, most excellent Festus,' Paul replied. 'I'm saying what is true and reasonable. The king is familiar.' Now, this is amazing. Imagine who you're up against here right now. You're in shackles, and you are there addressing the guy, the great-grandson of the guy who tried to kill Christ, the grandson of the guy who tried to kill apostles in Christ, tried to go after Christ in his ministry, the son of the guy who was killing the apostles in the other part of Acts—and now he says, 'Hey, you're familiar with these things. I can speak freely to you, right? I'm convinced that none of this has escaped his own notice because it wasn't done in a corner.'

"'King Agrippa,' now check this out, 'hey, do you believe the prophets? Let's talk about you for a second.' Can you imagine that? I mean, you just want to get out of jail. That's all you really want. And now he's trying to pitch Christianity to the king. 'I know that you do. You believe the prophets now, don't you?'

"King Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'

“Paul said—oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to talk religion or politics with you. Forgive me. Is that what he says? Verse 29: ‘Short time or long, I pray God that not only you, but all who are listening to me today may become what I am.’ Not what I was. I used to oppose the truth of Christ and Christianity, but now I’m all about it. ‘I got—look at that list he went through, verse 18—I’ve got my eyes opened. I’ve turned from darkness to light. I’m out of the power of Satan, and now I’m under the control of God. I’ve got forgiveness of sins. I’ve got a place among those who are sanctified by faith. I’ve got all of that. I want everybody to have that.’

“He says, ‘I want them to be what I am. But, you know, if you took the handcuffs off, that’d be really cool. Yet without these chains. Can I go free?’

“But what an amazing, bold, passionate thing for Paul to do. You got me in prison, but I want you to think about where you’re heading. I want you to think about the veracity of the message of Christ. And he says, ‘I want everybody to get on the path that I’m on.’

“You know, Paul is constantly showing he is motivated to share the gospel because he looks at what God has done in his life, and he says that needs to be the template, the pattern, and the motivation for me to share that with others. It’s just part of the motivation, but let’s jot it down. Number one on your outline. When it comes to Paul addressing himself as Paul, new name, it is a reminder, at least to us, that he isn’t who he used to be. He’s got a new life.

“Number one: Let us be motivated, just like Paul was, by our new life in Christ.

“I need to be motivated to share the message because God’s changed me. If we found the cure to cancer—I know it’s an old saw—but we wouldn’t want to say, ‘Well, let’s go sing about it in the corner. Let’s not invite anybody to this party.’ We’d say, ‘If I found forgiveness of sins and God has redirected my life, I fought the truth and now I embrace it. It’s brought me a relationship with God and I’m not going to suffer eternity in hell. I think that’s a good thing. I want everybody to have what I have.’ I mean, that’s a good starting point for us.

“Paul is there as a new life in Christ, and his passion is for other people to experience the same. How passionate are you about that happening? Really—seriously. Do you ever sit and ponder and think about where I was as a non-Christian and where I was headed as a non-Christian? And now I look at my neighbors and I think it’d sure be good for them to go to sleep tonight in their bed with the security that I have when I fall asleep at night, that I’m going to be in the presence of God if I don’t make it through this night of sleep. I’ve got security in Christ. I’ve got forgiveness of sins. I’m not going to suffer the words, ‘Depart from me, I never knew you.’

“You know, that’s going to be a dreadful thing for all my coworkers to experience. Do you ever think those thoughts? ‘I’d sure like them to have what I have.’

“‘Not only you,’ verse 29 says, ‘but all who are listening to me today, I pray that they might become what I am.’

“One more passage before we leave this thought. 1 Timothy chapter 1. 1 Timothy chapter 1. Please take a look at this with me. Paul always uses this as some motivation for him to keep on sharing the gospel. And if you haven’t stopped recently to ponder the relief, the joy, the benefit, the value of being a Christian and thinking that through as it relates to those in your life that don’t have it, it needs to happen. And it will prompt you and it will motivate you to open your mouth and to risk relationship. It’ll turn the back-row Baptist into a preacher. It’ll turn the guy who hates controversy into an apologist for the Christian faith. It’ll take the person that wants peace at any price and wants to be friends with everyone—it will turn them into people that are willing to risk everything for the gospel: every relationship, every loyalty, their reputation—if you just think about what you have and what others around you don’t have.

1 Timothy chapter 1—Paul pondered this a lot. He thought about, in verse 14, “the grace of our Lord, which was poured out on me abundantly.” Are you with me? 1 Timothy 1:14. “Along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” It’s great what I have.

But he can’t think about that advantage very long without thinking about people that don’t have it. He says in verse 15, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” He knew his sin the best. It was notorious. It was bad.

He says, “But for that very reason,” look at that, look at the strategic thinking about his own testimony, “for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”

Did you catch that? Paul says, “I got plucked out of that Saul lifestyle so that I could be a Christian, so that that testimony would show itself as an example to those who would trust in Christ.”

I think of that for my own life. I wasn’t the Apostle Paul. I don’t have one of those dramatic testimonies, but I have the testimony like a lot of you. Grew up in church and didn’t get it. Christ gave me grace and opened my eyes after years of not understanding what I even proclaimed to others. And in my case, same thing. Church leader, president of the youth group—didn’t get it. Why did God do that? Finally opened my eyes in college. Why?

The Bible says, if I think like the Apostle Paul—because it can be a template, it can be an encouragement, it can be an attractive view of how God takes people like me and turns them into people that get the grace and forgiveness, the darkness to light, the opened eyes, the holiness, the faith, the love, the grace that are in Christ.

Do you view your testimony that way? Good way. Good thing to do. God has saved me in my situation so that I can use that new life in Christ as a motive, as a tool, to show other people how God can save them too.

Now the testimony is not the whole of the gospel, but some people are so down on using testimonies in evangelism they don’t even think about how it proves to be not only a template but a huge motivation to get out there and share the gospel.

Be motivated by your new life in Christ. Don't mean to make too much of one word, our first word in Romans, but it's Paul, not Saul—and that's a big deal, because Paul is drawing on his own conversion before he launches on a lengthy explanation about the gospel.

Secondly, Romans chapter 1, verse 1—after giving his name, he tells us how he sees himself, and it's as a servant of Christ Jesus. Let's take that one phrase: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus."

Now, unfortunately, modern translations often do this: they've taken a word that is very poignant and intense, and they've softened it a bit. When you see the word servant, you think of one who serves, right? Servant's one who serves. There's a whole lot more to this word than that.

You Sunday school grads know this is the word *doulos*, right? *Doulos*. And *doulos* is translated best and most accurately not as a servant—one who serves—I mean, a person that cleans a house or mows a lawn—that's not it. It's as a—what's the word? Slave. A bondslave. A servant who is enslaved for the bidding of a master. That's the word—a *doulos*.

Now, before you inject your American perspectives on slavery into that word, which is why the translators often kind of soften it a little bit, you need to understand that when Paul writes to the Romans in Italy, there are somewhere, historians say, between two and three million people that were slaves in Italy. I mean, it was ubiquitous. There was—what does that equal? About 35 to 40 percent, maybe more, of the workforce.

Picture that. Think about that. That means that you have four people out of ten in your workspace, in your cubicle, at your office, who are not there as free-will employees—they're conscripted by masters to work in that place.

And if you're saying, "Well, that's not what slavery is all about. Slaves are out there, you know, digging ditches and trenches." No, no, no, no. You need to understand, in ancient Roman culture, they weren't doing just the lowlife jobs of the society. They were employed at all levels of Roman society. It was not just the trench diggers. It was the cobblers, the shopkeepers—slaves occupied positions, I know this is hard to believe—as doctors, as teachers, as philosophers.

Right? The thing—and I used to teach it this way because I didn't understand this word as well in its cultural context—I used to think Paul was looking at this and just thinking, "Well, I'm just a lowly slave, just a lowly servant." It's not about rank here. It has nothing to do with rank. The commonality in Rome, when you said, "I'm a slave," was not, "Oh, then we know what you are. You're just mowing the lawns," right? That's not what it was.

To be a slave, the commonality in the ancient world was simply this: you're not self-directed. That's what it meant. You didn't choose to do whatever you're doing. You were purchased and you were conscripted. You were told and assigned to do what you're doing.

See, a president of a university in Rome—let's just think that through—might buy some people and say, "You're going to teach philosophy. You're going to teach economics." And then I'll hire some freemen and they'll teach in other classes. I know that's hard to believe.

You might be running some kind of ancient hospital, if you will, medical center. And you may buy some people as a rich benefactor, and you may say, "Here, I'm buying you. Now you're going to learn medicine and you're going to practice medicine here." There were all kinds of people through the entire strata of society in ancient Rome that were slaves.

Now, there was some abuse, obviously. That happens. And there were people that have stories in ancient Latin literature about people being abused in Greek literature as slaves. But that's not the picture. The picture is—let's give you a passage. 1 Corinthians 6. Here's a good definition of slavery in the Scripture. Verses 19 and 20. Here are the three components of slavery.

It's not that you're a lowlife. And it's not that you're under the abuse of some mean person. Here's what it is:

1. That you are not your own
2. You're purchased with a price
3. You've got to now honor or do the bidding of your master

Those are the three commonalities. That's the definition of *doulos* in Scripture. You're not your own, bought with a price, you've got to serve the master—do his bidding, not your own. You're not self-directed. You are not free to do as you want.

Paul says, "When I signed up to be a Christian, I became a *doulos* of Christ." Which, by the way, we're going to learn all that, because I know some of you think, "Well, that's not the norm for Christianity." Is it? Absolutely.

In Romans 6 and 7, we're going to learn to be purchased out of the bondage of slavery and the penalty to sin is to become a *doulos* of Christ. Eleven times he uses the word in two chapters alone in the book of Romans—Romans 6 and 7—eleven times he uses the word *doulos*. He's explaining the fact that every single person that becomes a Christian becomes a *doulos*.

So this is not unique. He just says, "That's at the forefront of my mind." And what does that mean? I'm not self-directed. I can't choose to do whatever I want to do. I have to do what the master says. I've been purchased with a price.

And by the way, what is that price specified in Scripture? You have been purchased by his blood. He gave his life to buy you.

See, you really got two choices in Scripture. You need to be a slave to your own passions and desires—that's to be a slave to sin—or you can be a slave to God. You got two choices.

And that's what Paul says. "I was purchased out of the enslavement to sin," which Ephesians 2 says you get to do whatever you want—I know that sounds contradictory, but slavery to sin means you get to do whatever you want. And you follow the impulses of your flesh and all the directions and currents of the world. You do whatever you want. You choose to do what you want—which is a type of enslavement.

Or you become conscripted and a slave to Christ and you do what he wants.

Paul says, "I'm owned by Christ. Therefore, what he says I've got to do, I'm not free to do whatever I want to in this life."

Number two—let's use a stronger word. Stronger than motivated. You and I need to be constrained in our life and how we live it as it relates to the gospel—by your new role.

Because you have a new role. You're not a freeman anymore. You might be freed from sin, but you are now a slave of Christ. And Paul says, "That's how I view myself."

As it relates—it's prefatory—we're going to see it—it's going to lead us up to the statement about being set apart for the gospel. And that's helpful for the Apostle Paul because he says, "I don't have a choice in this. I got to do whatever Christ tells me to do."

And here's the paradigm. Let's turn to Mark chapter 1. Matthew, Mark—second book of the New Testament. Mark chapter 1.

Here's the paradigm in Scripture. When you come to Christ, he's got an immediate commission in your life. He's got an immediate role for you to play. It's not just that you're a servant—you're a servant with a task.

Mark chapter 1. I know some people think of the Great Commission—which this series is going to be about—that we're called to make disciples. We've got to open up our mouth. We've got to step up for the gospel. We've got to risk relationship, risk reputation, and we've got to speak up for Christ.

And some people are going to say, "Well, yeah, I know about that—the Great Commission—and Christ pulled that on them in the last chapter of the gospels." And that's how it's often framed in people's minds. We've got the Great Commission, Matthew 28, end of the thing. He's about to go home. He goes, "Oh, and by the way, go make disciples."

Look at Mark chapter 1. This is how the whole thing started. The Great Commission didn't come at the end of Christ's earthly ministry—it came at the very beginning.

A little context. Verse 14, Mark 1:14. John the baptizer put in prison. His voice was silenced. He was out preaching repentance, forgiveness. Christ then goes into Galilee, and he starts proclaiming the *euangelion*, the good news of God.

And what is that? Well, the punchline is this: "The kingdom of God is near," he says the next verse. "Repent and put your trust"—believe—that's a weak English word for the word *pisteuō*—"believe in the good news." You can have forgiveness. You can be right before God. Same thing John was preaching.

As Jesus then walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he's now going to recruit a team. He sees Simon and his brother Andrew casting nets into the lake, for they were fishermen—that's what they did.

And he said, "Come and follow me." There's repentance and faith. Think about it, right? We've talked about that in Matthew 19. Don't do what you're doing. Do what I want you to do. You got to turn from your path to my path and follow me—that's going to take trust. You're going to have to trust me. I'm going to be your new leader now. "Come and follow me."

Jesus said—middle of verse 17—and here's the conjunction that's so important that you and I need to understand about being followers of Christ. If that is my role—a follower—another word for it—a *doulos*, a slave—here comes the commission right out of the gate. This is the evangelistic call: "And I will make you fishers of men."

Now, that's not normally at the end of the tract, right? That's not at every stadium evangelist's message. But that's part of the gospel. And if you don't get that, we've missed what the gospel's all about.

God has called you to himself so that you can join the team and get the message out and be fishers of men—draw more people to Christ.

Now, people see that as an appendage to the Christian life. Recognize that all the things I think Christ called me to are absolutely secondary as it relates to my function presently to the role of fishing for men.

Think about this. If you said, "Well, he called me to a place of fellowship with God." Great. You want fellowship with God? Let's go see him. Okay? That's not here, right? We get his Spirit now—long distance. Let's see him face to face. That's going to be one day, but it's not now.

"Oh, it's about worship." About worship. We get to worship him. He's calling me to give honor to the Father. Great. You want to give honor to the Father? You want to worship him? It's going to be great there—fantastic. Can't be any better than worship in heaven.

"It's about learning his word, learning his truth, practicing his truth." Best Bible studies are not going to be here on earth, right? You'd much rather have Jesus preaching to you this morning—not me. He's there, not here, right?

"Living a godly life." Fantastic. Want to live a godly life? You'll live a much more godly life in the kingdom than you will right now because you won't have the problems of the flesh, the devil, and the world. It'll be much better.

The only thing you cannot do in the kingdom that is left for you functionally now to perform is the calling he gives at the very beginning to all the people he calls.

He says, "Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Now, it's true—he wants to make us worshipers. He wants to make us obedient. He wants to make us knowledgeable about Scripture. But the thing that he needs us to do now—the thing that he calls us to do now—the role that we play is to be a servant of Christ sharing the gospel—fishers of men.

Now I know a lot of people—this is a side note and you just write it down—Romans chapter 10, the excuses come. "Well, that's for them, not for me. That's for you types—you vocal, outgoing, extroverted preacher types. That's not for me."

Before you go down that line—and this is a sidebar—you'll have to figure this one out as you study through the passage. Romans chapter 10, verses 13 through 15 is the gist of it all.

You've got to know that not only does it not logically make any sense that the apostles or preachers are the only people sharing the gospel—he makes that crystal clear in Romans 10, as we'll get to sometime down the road—that no one can be saved in your sphere of influence unless someone speaks up about the gospel.

Now there's so much more proof in Scripture, but that's a good statement in Romans chapter 10 reminds me that the call to be fishers of men is not exclusive to some level of Christianity or some role in the church or some apostolic band of followers.

You might as well just apply that message and that call to your Christian life. Christ called to you and said at some point in your life, "Come and follow me," and you might as well hear the rest of it, "and I will make you fishers of men."

And if you don't recognize that your role is to gather more people under the lordship of Christ, you don't understand the call of the gospel. It comes with this next appendage.

You and I represent him in this world. We're ambassadors for Christ.

And if you do it, you're still in Mark 1, turn to Mark chapter 3. Just to bring the theme of this series back to the fore, take a look at this statement.

You just got to know that when you do it, you're probably going to expect the kinds of things that Christ encountered.

Jesus is busy sharing the message he started sharing in Mark 1:15. And that gave us the geographic setting and that was in Galilee. He's still in Galilee in Mark chapter 3 sharing the message, doing exactly what the Bible says he started to do in Mark 1.

Now it's Mark chapter 3 and in verse number 20, he goes to a house and he's going to preach again. He's going to share the message of the gospel.

Mark 3, look at verse 20: Jesus enters a house and again a crowd had gathered. Now all this gospel stuff had taken up a lot of time. There's crowds everywhere he goes. He and his disciples, it says, were not even able to eat. Think about that. Busy stuff, lots to do, can't even catch a meal.

When his family heard about this, they said, “We’re so proud of you, Jesus. Right on. Go win more people for Christ.” Is that what it says, verse 21? “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him.” Right? Why? Look at the next phrase: “For they said, ‘He’s out of his mind.’”

It’s crazy. He’s lost it. Now, these are people that love Christ. Think about that. And they’re looking at him going, “It’s all about winning people to Christ. You can’t even eat. What’s wrong with you? We’ve got to go take charge. You can’t do this. It’s not right.”

Now, your therapist would not agree with this, Christ. Too much work for others. You’re not caring for yourself. Someone said, “Share it at the door.” It’s kind of like Britney Spears’ parents, right? Not exactly, but same idea, right? Got to take charge. They’ve lost it. That’s what his parents thought—and they loved him.

What about the people he’s preaching to? Well, some were becoming Christians because the disciple band was growing, but there were a lot of people, next verse, who didn’t like what he was teaching.

Matter of fact, a lot of authority figures in Judea and Galilee, people like this—the teachers of the law, verse 22—who came down from Jerusalem and they said, “He is possessed by”—what’s the word?—Beelzebub.

What’s that? You know what that is, right? It’s another name for Satan—Beelzebub. It’s the word that means “lord of the fly,” lord of the flies, lord of the dunghill, lord of the stink pile. “That’s what you are. That’s what you’re doing. You’re possessed by Beelzebub. By the prince of demons he’s driving out demons.”

Now, this is not a good prospectus here. Your friends think you’re nuts, and some of the people you’re preaching to think you’re totally wrong. You’re so wrong you’re in league with Satan.

Well, that was Christ because he was pretty outgoing.

One more passage where we leave this thought. Matthew chapter 10. Got to turn to this one, please. Matthew chapter 10.

Well, Christ looks back later in his ministry at this encounter, and he says this about it. He turns to his disciples in Matthew 10, and he says this. Drop down to verse number 24. Matthew chapter 10, verse 24:

“A student is not above his teacher,” right? I mean, I don’t think you have it better than your teacher. “And a servant”—by the way, here’s our word—“is not above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub”—Lord of the Flies, Lord of the Stink Hill, which he had—“how much more the members of his household.”

If you signed up to let Christ be your king—hey, he's my Lord, really—then you're his servant. And if you're his servant, you're not above the master. You're not going to get a better life than the master.

And the master, the Bible says, was called by his enemies in league with Satan. And secondly, his family—we skipped right over the family—the family thought he was crazy. "You're out of your mind."

Sidebar. You ready for a sidebar? Here's the reason some of you will never apply this sermon series. Are you ready for this? Here's why you will listen to this, and you'll write a few notes down, some of you, and you'll go, "Oh, that's nice."

Because we talked about idolatry in the last series—because unfortunately, we as Christians, we have an idolatry for, a love for, a priority for our reputations that often will outshine our practical obedience to the master.

Think this one through. The reason we'll say, "I don't want to do that," is because of these two things right here: people you love will think you've lost it, and people that are listening to what you're saying will say you're wrong.

Now think about it. I don't want people to think I'm crazy, and I don't want people to think I'm wrong. I have a natural desire just like you do to be liked and to be thought of as right. I want to be thought of as right and I want people to think, "Hey, Mike's a good guy."

Here's the choice though. I can be obedient to the calling of the master which says, "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. Go out there just like I did preaching the good news."

And when you do, by the way, your friends will think you're crazy and some people you preach to will think you're totally wrong—so wrong you're like the devil. Wow.

And don't think, by the way, it's gonna be better for you than it was for me. That's going to go, "I won't do that." Here's why: because I love my reputation too much.

Got to make a choice. Seriously, this is what this series gets down to. Are you willing to take your love for your reputation and put it on the altar and say, "I'm willing to sacrifice my reputation to be what God has asked me to be—a representative, an ambassador, an emissary, a delegate of the gospel"?

Some of you will keep quiet because you love your reputation. I'm asking you to step out. I'm going to tell you, this is what the Bible teaches us—to step out.

Some of you are underground Christians right now. You know exactly what I'm talking about. If I went around to your coworkers—"I think he goes to church. I'm not sure." They don't know about your passion for Christ.

You'll share it here. You'll high-five people on the patio. "Let's pray together." All of that happens here, but it doesn't happen out there.

And I'm saying, are you willing to come out from the underground Christianity and be vocal about your commitment to Christ? If you are, they're going to think you're nuts. Even people that like you and people that aren't so keen on you are going to say, "The guy's so wrong."

Are you willing?

Us preachers—we've already lost that whole battle, right? Think about it. Seriously. When I decided I'm going to be a pastor, right, I was done with being cool. That was over. You can't tell your buddies on the golf course that you've just met, "I'm a pastor," and they go, "Great," right? It ain't great. I am exposed.

And what I'm telling you is, as a servant of Christ, you're going to have to be exposed too. And you will fight that if you love a good reputation, because that's what's going to keep you from it.

Here's two verses that might help. We won't turn there, but jot them down. Daniel 12:3 and Galatians 6:14.

Daniel 12:3, Galatians 6:14.

Daniel 12:3 says this: "Those who are wise"—or as the passage reads, and there's two ways to look at that first phrase, "those who impart wisdom"—"they will shine like the brightness of the heavens." That's a daytime analogy. It'll be like they are the sun shining in the sky. And it says, "Those who lead many to righteousness, they will shine like the stars forever and ever."

In other words—and this is in the context of one of the first clear statements from the period of the Babylonian exile of the prophets articulating the afterlife—and he's saying, "Hey, if you are all about imparting wisdom and leading people to righteousness, you will have an eternal reputation that's good."

And what I'm asking you to do is be willing to lay on the altar your reputation now. Be willing to be thought of as crazy and wrong in the eyes of a lot of people that you want to be liked by and say, "I'm going to trade it in for an eternal reputation that's good."

Follow this now. Because, as we quoted last week, as Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

You're going to lose your reputation with people—absolutely. I mean, this is not an enduring reality here. But you're going to live in an eternal kingdom where your reputation is going to be established, and you're going to have to live with that reputation forever.

All I'm saying is let's give up what you can't keep anyway so that we can gain what we can't lose—a reputation in the kingdom. That's a good biblical motivation.

I'd like to shine, as he puts it, like the brightness of the sky, and I'd like to lead many to righteousness so I can be like a star that shines throughout eternity. I want that good reputation.

But you're going to have to cash in the reputation now and be willing to be thought of as odd.

And Paul was there, right? He carried around a business card that got him mocked, just like I do, and I'm asking you to sign up to say, "I'm a bondslave of Christ. I've got my calling, my role from him. I'm a fisher of men."

And he said this in Galatians 6:14—I made you write that one down. In Galatians 6:14 he says, "May I never boast in anything except Christ and his cross." That's all I want to boast in. That's what I want to be all about.

He said, "Through which"—I love this—"the cross. Through which the world has been crucified to me. It's dead. And I to the world." That's such a great statement.

"Through the cross," he says, "the world has been crucified to me and I to it." In other words, "I don't give a rip anymore about what people think of me on this planet. It doesn't really matter. It's dead to me and I'm dead to it. All I want to do is fulfill my role as a fisher of men, as a slave of Christ."

I'm not free to live however I want. I want to live as a representative of the gospel.

Be motivated by your new life—this is Paul, not Saul. See yourself as he saw himself because he's going to prove it in chapter 6 and 7. And that's what you are.

You are a servant, a *doulos* of Christ, a slave of Christ.

And then here's the punchline. Romans chapter 1 verse 1: "called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God."

Now those two phrases go together because they simply restate one another. "Called to be an apostle" means "to be set apart for the gospel of God." That's what an apostle is.

But before we get too far down that road, we need to think quickly about how many apostles there are. Not a trick question—how many apostles are there? Twelve. Very good.

And we've learned that in many places. Matter of fact, one of the synonyms Jesus uses for the apostles in the gospel is the phrase "the Twelve." That's what he likes to call them—the Twelve.

We know also from Matthew chapter 19—we were studying it last week—that the Twelve that followed him in this life, he says, will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve.

We learned last week in Revelation 21:14 that there will be twelve names on the twelve foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem. Twelve.

Okay, here's the problem. In Scripture, we also see Epaphroditus, Barnabas, Titus, Silas, Timothy, Paul, and Jesus called *apostolos*, apostle. That's too many because we already got the other twelve named.

Here's what we derive from the word's use in Scripture. There is a technical use of the word—let's call that capital "A"—and then there's a non-technical use of the word—let's call that small "a."

One is an apostle in terms of the Twelve, and the other is the use used elsewhere in Scripture, and that means a delegate of the gospel, a representative of the gospel.

Here's what we'll learn in Scripture: there are only twelve apostles, capital A, but every single person that decides to follow Christ is an apostle—non-technical sense, small a—who is representing the gospel in the world.

Let me prove that to you. Here's a simple passage. You can jot it down. It's so short, you don't need to turn there. John 13:16.

Here's the parallel passage to what we were just reading over there in Matthew 10. When he says this: "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master." Here's another line Jesus uses: "Nor is an *apostolos*—an apostle—greater than the one who sends him."

That's a general sense. As a matter of fact, the NIV translates it "messenger." This is the way we see it translated often. And oftentimes that word apostle gets tucked under an English word like representative—messenger, ambassador.

But the word is apostle. And the point is, in this passage, we're all called apostles. We're a servant. We're all servants. We're all sent ones.

See? So you could have on your business card—you think it's bad to have pastor on your business card—picture this one: see, your name, and underneath it is apostle. That'd freak your coworkers out, right? Hi—Bill Smith, apostle. What? What? Yeah, that's what I am. I'm a delegate of God bringing you the gospel.

You don't think they think you're crazy doing that? I'm not trying to purposely be a nutty, crazy person, but if I'm serious about my role, that's how they're going to see this. Because Paul says that's what he is and that's what we all are.

Now, some people—sidebar, ready? Taking our partners program, have you taken that? I'm into sidebars. Have you noticed that? In the column there, I have that for deeper study. Here's a deeper study if you're the overachiever in the crowd.

There is a bit of a question, a mystery about the Twelve. Because the Bible says—and here's one we know in the future—we're going to have to identify all twelve of them. And my question is, who's the twelfth? Because there's one that I'm thinking we don't want on the wall, right?

So, though the Bible doesn't specifically say, I mean, I suppose some could argue—although I haven't written any articles that do so—that Judas—we're going to walk by, "Oh, there's Judas' name." I'm assuming that's not going to be there.

And the apostles assumed that too. Because in Acts chapter 1, you Sunday school grads know, they said, "We're going to pick another one to replace him." And so they picked a guy named Matthias. Remember that?

I call him the Vegas apostle, right? Sunday school grads got that little joke. Why? How did they choose him? Cast lots, right? "All right, lot fell to you. You're a part of our team now." Okay? I know he's not going to be happy with me. He's probably not going to see me for years. Because I call him the Vegas apostle.

But Matthias—follower of Christ—are we going to see his name on the wall? Here's the sidebar. It is perhaps that Paul sees himself as the technical apostle.

Let me give you three passages. You can do your homework on this and off you go:

- 1 Corinthians 15:5–10
- Galatians 1:12 and the context
- Galatians 2:7–9

Take those three passages and some people see the implication that Paul is the twelfth apostle.

Now if we keep Matthias, that's thirteen—that's too many. There's only twelve spots on the walls. It's an interesting question. Okay? Some of you say, "I don't care." Fine. Matthias cares, right? And it is an interesting question.

Sidebar done.

If Paul is an *apostolos*—small a—and we're all called that, right? 2 Corinthians 8, John 13:16 we just read—then that is an interesting thing.

I am now commissioned with the message of the gospel. As he puts it, "set apart for the gospel of God."

Number three on your outline. Tough to find a word for this, but if there is an effect that that reality should have—my commission as an apostle—let's call it this:

Number three: it should propel us to open up our mouth and speak about Christ.

Number three: be propelled by your commission. You're commissioned with the gospel of Christ. So you ought to get out there and make the most of this. This is your job. Your business card in heaven says, you know, Joe—apostle. That's what you are. You are set apart by God, perhaps not in the technical sense that Paul may have been, but you are definitely set apart like all the other guys in Scripture or the big picture in Scripture of all of us who are sent by Christ into the world.

Another passage to read on this would be John 17. He says, "Just as I was sent from God, so I'm sending you into the world." That's what we are—we're apostles now—little divine—let's not call it that—let's call it sanctified logic. Okay? You don't want to call it divine, but here's some sanctified logic. See if this follows me on this one.

Jot this one down. Acts 17. Acts chapter 17, verses 25 through 27. Let's just call that proposition number one—that's the foundational statement that I'm going to try to draw a conclusion on.

Ready? See if you don't have to buy this. This is a logical argument, not a biblical argument, but perhaps it follows—I think it will.

In Acts 17, Paul is there defending himself again before leaders in Athens because he's preaching about the gospel. And here's what he says in part of his response. He talks about the fact that God made from one man every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth—you remember these verses?—and he determined—God, the sovereign God—the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

You remember that? So God, the sovereign God, has chosen where people should live—why? In verse 27 it says, "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him."

Okay? I don't think we can argue with this. When it comes to your salvation, God made you to be born on the timeline exactly when he wanted you to be born, and he put you in the exact places—those are the words of Acts 17:26—where you should live so that you would embrace the gospel.

He did a lot of other things, but part of what he did was he put you at the right time in the right place.

Now we can affirm that.

Let's take that one step further. This is the extrapolation part.

2 Corinthians chapter 2. Let me turn you to this one. 2 Corinthians chapter 2.

If God put us exactly where he wanted us to get saved, let's see if we can't make this case from 2 Corinthians chapter 2. And I think Paul clearly has this in his mind as he writes this.

He's also leading us to live and be at places and times so that we can represent him. Your apostleship—small a, non-technical sense—is sovereignly guided by God so that you can be talking to the exact people in the exact places where he calls you to be.

Look at it this way. Verse 14, 2 Corinthians 2:14: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us"—leads us is a key phrase, you should underline that—"in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him, of Christ."

So got the picture so far? Paul is seeing himself as led through this life. Now he's bringing the knowledge of Christ everywhere. He called it a fragrance.

He says, keeping that metaphor going, verse 15: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." We're giving that fragrance off, if you will. We're stinking up the place for Christ.

And some, they get saved by it. And others—they're not. They're perishing and they don't get it. They call us crazy. They call us wrong.

Verse 16: "To the one, we are the smell of death." They hate it. "Oh, shut up about that great stuff." "To the other, we are the fragrance of life." "We want to hear more about that. Teach me more. I want to know about that."

It's a polarizing message.

"Who is equal to such a task?" More on that in a second.

"Unlike so many," he says, "we don't peddle the word of God for profit. We're not in this for money. I mean, if we're crazy out of our minds in people's minds, it's for God's sake."

"On the contrary," he says, "in Christ we speak before God." We're spreading this message out in the light of God. God is keeping us accountable on this.

He says, "like men"—underline this phrase—"sent from God." There's the apostolic part.

Now, the context is evangelism. The context is being led by God through this life and smelling up the place with the gospel. And he says, when we're doing that, it's like we're "sent from God"—*apostolos*.

Here's my point. If God puts you on the planet at the right time in the right place, in the right city, in the right neighborhood, going to the right church, the right people, right Christian friends, and you came to repentance and faith, he's not only orchestrating it from that side of the coin—he's orchestrating it now from the other side of the coin when those people affected you.

They were there in the right place at the right time, just like God wanted them to be. And so it is for you.

Being led through this life, tossing the gospel out—not peddling it for money—but speaking with sincerity about Christ before God like people sent from God.

Now look at that phrase: "Who's equal to such a task?" Seriously. I mean, it's not just a trite little cute analogy that you're an apostle. If you're spreading the message of the gospel, it's like you're sent from God to your office, to your neighborhood.

God put you there. To your family members. God strategically placed you there.

That's heady stuff. Who's equal to such? Nobody. It's a big deal.

But if you think about your life that way—like you are commissioned to live where you live, to sit in the office seat where you sit, to have the cubicle where yours is or whatever it is you do Monday through Friday—that I am doing this. I have that client because God orchestrated that.

Now that I'm a Christian—not to be saved, but to get other people saved—is that not going to open up our mouth so we can start talking about Christ? Start talking about Christ.

Be propelled by your new commission.

Let me just make one point from Luke chapter 8. This can rightly be called a sidebar. Please do not—I mean, there's so many things we can't address in this sermon of excuses that I know come up in our minds. But here's one excuse, okay?

We often think that we're not led in that triumphal procession because we're not where we want to be to be the best at representing Christ that we can be.

In other words, "I know that I could be an effective evangelist spokesman for Christ if I were in the mission field," or "if I had a Bible school education," or "if I go to seminary," or "if we're in full-time ministry."

In other words, we say, "I would really be sharing the gospel then, but I'm not now." See?

It's like the guy who wants to be a missionary who comes and says, "Well, I want to be a missionary." I say, "Well, are you sharing your faith?" They say, "No. But I will when I go there."

As my old pastor used to say, "As now, so then." I said that all the time. If you're not sharing the gospel now, you're not going to share it then.

Same for you, by the way. You're not going to be defending Christ then after that apologetics degree that you get, if you're not willing to defend him now.

If you don't get to be where you think you should be to maximize your testimony and the gospel, are you going to hold back?

Luke chapter 8—I brought that up because there was the demoniac. You remember the story there on the cliff? There's only one place where this could be in Galilee, where the swine all rushed down the hill because the demons were cast out of this guy.

Remember that guy? In Luke chapter 8, it describes that story.

And when the man is done and dressed in his right mind and he's clothed and he's a normal guy now because Christ fixes the problem, he begs Christ in verse number 38 and 39 to go with Christ on this traveling itinerant—probably through the Decapolis—all the cities to speak up for Christ.

And Christ says in verse 39, Luke 8:39, he says, "No, you can't. Return home and tell how much God has done for you."

And I love the end of this because this is not how most people respond. "So the man went away and told all over town how much God had done for him."

My point is this. He thought, "I could really go out there with you and do some great stuff across the ocean"—in his case, over the hills and over there—"for Christ, and I'll do that for you."

And he says, "No, I want you to speak up for me right where you're at."

And my point is, if the door's closed for you, and you can't go to Bible school, and you're not a missionary, and you're not retired yet, and you got too many kids to spend any time investing in a van—stop with all of that.

When those doors are closed, it's exactly because God's got you in the right place at the right time to share Christ with who you come in contact with.

So stop dreaming about a more effective season of life or a better geographic location.

I'll offer you going to the ends of the earth to share the gospel. Let's send you. That's great. But if you can't be sent or you're not yet sent, you'd better be stinking up the place where you're at.

See what I'm saying?

Because here's what Jesus said, Matthew chapter 5. He said, "If the salt is not salty anymore, what good is it?" He answers the question. "It is good for nothing," he says, "only to be trampled underfoot by men."

What a powerful analogy. If you're not speaking up for Christ at your office, you're nothing but a doormat. I know you think you're going to be a doormat if you speak up. No—that's not the point. You will be salt. You'll make a difference.

You may polarize people. They may think you're nuts. They may think you're wrong. But if you sit silently as the silent witness, here's the deal: you're good for nothing, God says.

You've got to be salty.

Here's a more common analogy. The next verse. He says, "You are like a light." And a city set on a hill—you can't hide that. And a lamp—you don't light a lamp and put it under a bowl. You put it on a stand so that it can shine and give light to everyone in the house.

You're living in a house right now. What are you doing? I mean, this is Sunday school songs now, right? This little light of mine. Do you want to sing it? I mean, this is what it is. I'm going to let it shine.

The point is, you and I have to speak up for Christ—living our lives, doing our good deeds before men so that they can praise our Father in heaven.

And you super skeptics say, "See, right there—it says good deeds before men." They would never know who to praise, right? They would never know why you do it. They would never be able to praise your Father in heaven unless you told them.

This is not silent witness stuff. This is good deeds and an articulated message of the gospel.

I know you've got a million reasons why we don't want to do this. I know this is scary for us. And if you think, "Well, Mike's got some gift," or, "You know, those apostles, they were really bold."

Remember the truth of Scripture. Every person who shares the gospel has trepidation. Paul says, "I came trembling before you in Corinth." He says, "Pray for me that I can be bold when I open up my mouth and speak the message of the gospel."

This is never going to be a comfortable thing. That's what I'm trying to say. If you're waiting for it to be comfortable, your reputation in heaven will stink.

See what I'm saying? You're never going to be comfortable with this. It's always going to be swallow hard, sweaty palms, accelerated heartbeat—"I got to speak up for Christ."

Let's just do it. That's why you're here. If you're not salty, what are you good for?

You just want to be a good worshiper? Great—go be with him and you'll be a great worshiper. Not suggesting you kill yourself, but I am saying you're not any good here on earth unless you open your mouth for Christ.

Not optional. *Doulos*. Slave. Right? Let's get at it.

Let's pray.

God, I pray this every week, but help us. We need your help. We see the example of the Apostle Paul, and I know example sermons like this are hard, because we distance ourselves from these people. We think they're different than us. But like James said about Elijah, they're people with a nature just like ours.

Paul had an accelerated heartbeat. His palms sweated and his knees knocked together when he had to stand up and speak for you, just like ours do. But he powered through all of that discomfort. He put his

love for his reputation on the altar, and he was willing to say, “I’ll risk being considered a nut. I’ll talk about Christ and let those who are perishing think it’s the smell of death.”

I’ll do all of that because I’m a slave of Christ, set apart as a sent one for the message of the gospel.

I pray that in the next four weeks we can start to catch a little bit of that spirit—not as an optional second-level kind of Christianity, but as the only Christianity known in the Scripture: people who are called to follow you so that we can be fishers of men.

Let us speak up for you this week and next week and next month and every year that we are allowed life on this planet. Don’t let us become tasteless salt, lights under a bowl.

God, give us that courage. Give us the strength to step up, step out, and speak up for you.

In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.