



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Jesus & Service

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Series: Unexpected
Mark 9:30-50

BIG IDEA – THE GREATEST LIFE THAT CAN BE LIVED IS A LIFE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS

I've heard it said that it's hard to preach a bad sermon to people you love. Two Cities Church, I love you, so if I preach a bad sermon it's not for that reason. In fact, every time I'm gone... I wasn't here last weekend, and every once in a while I'm not here. I'm on vacation or I'm somewhere else or I'm being developed. Every time, for me, it's never "Out of sight, out of mind." It's always "Distance makes the heart grow fonder." That's how I feel.

Whether it's Pastor Stephen or Pastor Caleb or Pastor Spencer or one of our guest preachers, they always do a great job, and I always wish I was here. I love you guys. I'm always reminded how much I love our church every weekend, all of the conversation before and after service.

I'm also reminded of how much I love our church every Weekender. We had a Weekender this last weekend. It's so exciting. It's all of these people, and they're coming into the life of our church, and they're going to be our new brothers and sisters as part of our church family. They've moved here or found our church. I love all of the stories.

I love the stories of people's marriages being reconciled and their families being restored and addictions being broken and mission being put on their hearts. So, I'm very excited about that. Guys, I also just want to tell you this. When I'm away, oftentimes I'm being developed by other pastors. Here's maybe a new thought for you, but every pastor needs a pastor. *I need a pastor.*

Every once in a while, I get to go away. I was away two weeks ago with a group of pastors. We were in New York City for the week. It was unbelievably developmental. I got to be led by a guy who has been in New York City doing ministry for 20 years, and I left with one thing (well, many things, but one main thing I want to share) that I want to bring back to this church and we want to implement more.

Here's what it is: *it's not enough to be godly and gifted*. Our church is so full of people who are godly and gifted. So often, when we look around, it's like, "Okay, we need a Community Group leader. Is there someone who's godly (they have character) and gifted (they have competence)? We need an elder. We need a staff person. We need a church planter. We're looking for the godly and the gifted."

We're not going to stop looking for the godly and gifted, but along with being godly and gifted, how about having power that comes from prayer? How about having a Spirit-filled life? How about having a walk with God? So, I'm just taking a moment at the beginning of the service to repent of my prayerlessness in front of you guys, and for being a church that doesn't pray like we should, and recommit publicly, because I need the accountability, to be a person and pastor of prayer.

I want to start right now by recommitting our lives and this church to being a church of prayer, because being godly and being gifted is great, but it's not enough. Let's pray, and then let's dive into the gospel of Mark.

Lord, we think about Jesus' words. One of his great rebukes when walking into the temple is that your house should be a house of prayer for all nations. Lord, we want to recommit to being a people of prayer. When the apostle Paul writes to the church, he, at one point, calls the church *those who call on the name of the Lord*. Lord, we want to be a people who call on your name.

We want to be a people who believe that prayer really is the place of power. It's the place of dependence. It's the place of intimacy. Jesus, you yourself said there are certain things that will not come out except by prayer. That means there are certain things that won't happen in marriages apart from prayer. There are certain things that are not going to happen in the lives of our kids without prayer.

There are certain things that are not going to happen in our families and in our neighborhoods and in our cities without prayer, Lord. So would you give us the desperation and the discipline of prayer, and would you hold our hands as we become a more prayerful people, and would you show us early and often the power of prayer? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Guys, if you're new, we're in the gospel of Mark. If you're watching online or you stepped in here or someone brought you, and you're like, "What is the gospel of

Mark?" it's one of four gospels that we have about the life of Jesus. What we believe about Jesus is he lived the best life you can live, and he left the greatest legacy you can leave.

Would you like to live a great life? Would you like to leave a great legacy? Well, part of what we're doing here is following Jesus and helping others find and follow Jesus. What we're doing in the gospel of Mark is we're watching Jesus, but we're not watching Jesus like some spectator scholar who's unemotionally involved and just kind of watching from a distance. No. We are watching Jesus in the gospel of Mark as worshipers.

Today we're going to pick up on the story of Jesus. He was on the Mount of Transfiguration. He went from the mountain into the mess. How many of you are like, "That's my life. One mountain, into the mess, back up to the mountain, back down to the mess"? We're going to pick up in Mark 9:30, and we're going to see he's walking with his disciples. Pick up with me there.

"They [Jesus and the Twelve] went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples..." This is interesting. I've told you before, but you can mark it (no pun intended) in Mark, chapter 9. Jesus now spends almost all his time exclusively with the twelve disciples. He's done with the crowds for the most part. He's done with the big debates with the Pharisees for the most part. He's done with the big healing ministry for the most part.

He's spending almost all his time with the twelve disciples. It's because Jesus understood something that I hope we would understand. There are only three things that last forever: God, his Word, and the souls of men. Maybe you've heard the African proverb. It's not a biblical proverb, but it's still true.

An African proverb basically says, "If your vision is for one year, plant wheat. If your vision is for 10 years, plant trees. But if your vision is for a lifetime, you'd better start planting people and investing there." That's what Jesus does. He dreams big. He starts small. He goes deep with the disciples.

Here's another interesting thing. Why 12? Well, there's a theological reason to that, obviously. The twelve disciples are kind of replacing the twelve tribes, and it's the new Israel and the new people of God. I get all that. But why else? Maybe you've heard recently...

There has been a lot of talk about something called a *circle of sympathy*. Have you ever heard of that? Maybe not. There's a lot of study right now on sympathy and empathy. One of the things they've said is the average person can only have 9 to 16

people in their circle of sympathy. Your circle of sympathy is people you actually, genuinely care about.

Here's the litmus test for if they are in your circle of sympathy: if they died, would you be devastated? I hope your spouse is on your list. Your mom and dad are going to be on your list if they're still alive. Your spouse should be on your list. Your kids are going to be on the list. It's hard to find. We may have a couple more after that.

These are people we are going to deeply invest in, and we're counting on them. We're connecting our lives to them in a meaningful, strategic, and consistent way. That's exactly what Jesus does with these twelve. He's investing completely in them to the point where he's not letting other people know he's doing things, or he's in certain places so he can invest more.

Now look at what happens here. Let's go to the next verse. It says in verse 31 (this is what Jesus is teaching), "**...saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'**" He's teaching the same thing. He's teaching about his death, his suffering, and his resurrection.

If you've been paying attention, two weeks ago, when we were in Mark 8 together, he said this exact same thing. In fact, you might go, "What is he doing? Did he hit..." I mean, back then they didn't have this, but did he hit the copy/paste function? Did he get lazy? "I'm just going to write down the same thing and copy and paste it over here." No, no.

First, he's reminding them of what's most important. You know this. As a parent, as a teacher, as a mentor, as a coach, half of what you do is teach people new things, and the other half is just to remind them of everything they already know but maybe forgot or don't realize it's that important.

This is what parents do. As a parent, you feel like, "I'm taking crazy pills! All I'm doing is telling my kids the same thing again and again and again." Well, this is what Jesus is doing. He's telling us the most important thing. He's talking about the cross. Now, when you look at the cross... If you look at what he says in chapter 9 and look at what he says in chapter 8, they're almost identical.

In chapter 8 he uses a word I talked about last time. It's the word *must*. He talks about the divine necessity of the atonement, that Christ had to go to the cross because sin is that big of a deal, and the only way to pay for it was for Jesus Christ to die in our place for our sins as our substitute.

If you look at chapter 9, he uses a different word that doesn't show up in chapter 8, so he's teaching us something different. It's the word *delivered*. What does *that* mean? Well, maybe the question is...*Who delivered Jesus into the hands of men?* Do you see? He says, "Jesus must be delivered into the hands of men."

At one level, I know the answer to that. The first answer to that, if you know your Bible at all, is it was Judas, one of the Twelve. We'll get there in the story eventually. He betrays him. He betrays him with a kiss. It was a long plan. He took money. You might say, "Okay, maybe it wasn't just Judas. Maybe it was Judas and the religious leaders. It was a larger conspiracy, and they handed him over." That would also be true.

But there's a deeper answer. If you read all of the gospel of Mark, and then you read Acts, and then you read Paul's writings, you actually realize it wasn't just that Judas handed him over and the religious leaders handed him over. Ultimately, God handed him over. Can you see the hand of God underneath the hands of men in your life?

You may ask, "Why did God hand him over? Why did God deliver him?" Well, this is the central message of Christianity. He handed him over, delivered him over to these men so he could die in our place for our sins so he could endure the punishment for our sins in our place.

I want you to understand this. Everything is going to flow from Jesus' teaching on the cross. Jesus always teaches about the cross and then teaches a bunch of implications of the cross for our lives. The first time we looked at this two weeks ago, he taught about the cross, and then he taught about suffering. Today, he's going to teach about the cross and then teach about service. I'll show you.

Now, are the disciples going to get it? Are they going to understand? Look at verse 32. ***"But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him."*** Have you ever not understood something? Some of you are like, "This explains my whole high school experience." Has there ever been something you haven't understood? All of the men are like, "Women. Yes."

What do you do when you don't understand something? See, the problem here is not that they don't understand. That *is* a problem, but if they didn't understand, they should ask. The problem is they don't understand *and* don't ask. Now, why don't people ask to understand Christianity better and what Christ said? I think there are three reasons.

The first reason you don't ask is you don't care. I think this is where our culture is. You could go to Reynolds High School or you could go to Wake Forest University or you could go to some skyscraper in our city and walk around and talk to the people in

there and say, "Hey, would you be interested in looking at what Jesus said and asking some questions about it and seeing who he is and why he lived and why he died and how important he is?"

I mean, he is worshiped by two billion people on earth. Would you be willing to give a couple of weeks to looking at the teachings of Jesus and asking some questions?" Most people probably would be polite, because we're still in the South, but their answer would be "No." It's usually some version of "This isn't relevant. It's not important. I don't care. I don't think I'm going to find anything." So, that's one reason people don't ask questions.

A second reason people don't ask questions is they don't want to look foolish. Remember in Algebra 2 when you didn't understand any of it? At the end of the class, the teacher says, "Hey, guys, raise your hand if you have any questions, if you didn't understand." You're like, "I didn't understand any of this, but I am not raising my hand," because as soon as you raise your hand, you're like, "I feel foolish. I feel exposed. I feel like the village idiot. I feel like my ignorance is on display."

The third reason (the deepest reason) people don't ask questions is they don't want to know the answer. Have you ever been there? "I don't want to look there. I don't want to ask my teenage daughter what she's doing. I don't want to talk to my son about what's going on in his room." We don't want to know. Why? It's called *willful blindness*. In our culture we say, "Knowledge is power." Here's what else knowledge is: responsibility and accountability. If I know, then I might have to do something about what I know.

01 A SERVANT HAS A NEW BULL'S EYE FOR GREATNESS...

So, anyway, this ends. They don't ask the question, and they go on a walk. Look at what happens next. Verse 33: "***And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?'***" It's interesting. They're not going to ask Jesus questions, so he asks *them* questions. What's interesting about Jesus (I think this is a helpful note for us to see) is Jesus is paying attention to the people in his life.

How good are you at paying attention? People who think about this say there's a difference between thinking and paying attention. Americans aren't good at either. *Thinking* is I have to actually think about this. I have to tear it apart. I have to make an argument. I have to understand "Is this a good idea? Is this a bad idea?" I have to think of competing ideas for this. I have to think about this long-term. It's very hard to think. Most people have to talk to other people to think.

The other thing is paying attention. *Paying attention* is I'm awake and alert and aware and observant. Have you ever wondered...? I've thought about this a lot. Why is it such a big deal to be at a kid's baseball game or a kid's sporting event? You know what I'm talking about? You hear these stories like, "My dad was at every game." You're like, "I know that's a big deal, but I don't know *why* that's a big deal."

Or "My dad was a great guy, but he wasn't at my games." Why is that such a big deal? I don't know all of the reasons. It's something like *this*: when you go to your kid's game, you're saying, "I'm paying attention to you." Kids will do anything for your attention. It's basically all they want.

So, Jesus is paying attention, and then he asks questions. He says, "Guys, what were you talking about?" Now, it's the most ridiculous thing ever. Look at verse 34. You know this is true because it's so ridiculous. ***"But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest."***

It's so silly, because what Jesus has done so far... He talked about "I'm the suffering servant. I have to go to the cross, and I have to die, and I have to be rejected by men." Then they're talking about being the greatest. How did *that* happen? Well, one answer is they didn't understand the upside-down, inside-out nature of the kingdom. I get it. That's true.

They didn't understand to be first you have to be last and to save your life you have to lose it. They didn't understand all that. But there's a more practical reason. Why are they arguing about the greatest? What just happened at the beginning of this chapter? Three guys get to hang out with Jesus and go up on the Mount of Transfiguration, and nine are not invited.

That happened. In fact, it's the second time it happened. If you go back to Mark 5, Jesus was going to go in to heal Jairus' daughter. I don't know exactly what the conversation was, but it was something like this: "Nine of you stay here. Peter, James, and John, come with me." It's going to happen again in the garden of Gethsemane.

So, when this happens... I mean, this is the normal human condition. It's like, "Well, why are *they* chosen?" So, maybe the nine start asking questions. We don't know for sure. We don't know who was arguing, but maybe the three start thinking one of them is better than the other or all three of them are better than the nine.

Guys, this is a conversation. This desire to be great is deep in us. All of the conversations about the GOAT... You know what the GOAT is, right? The Greatest Of All Time. Muhammad Ali gave that as a name for himself. Now people are asking, "Who's the greatest of all time at golf? Is it Tiger? Is it Jack Nicklaus? Who's the

greatest of all time at baseball? Who's the greatest of all time at basketball?" We're having these conversations.

Here's what I see. I see that all of us... Just admit it. We all want to be great. You see it with kids. As we get older, we get better at lying and minimizing things and not knowing ourselves and not admitting our true desires, but when you're a kid... Like, you talk to a 4-year-old girl. What does she want to be? A princess. We'd better know these things. Disney knows these things.

Why would you want to be a princess? Well, they can't articulate it at 4. They're saying something like, "I want to be great." Why does every 4- or 5-year-old boy want to be a police officer and a firefighter? Because they're right. It's great. "You save people? You take care of people? I want to be great like that." What is the obsession with superheroes and Marvel and DC? We want to be great.

Now, when they get older, your kids maybe get a little more sophisticated. My 8-year-old son now has moved on from firefighter and police officer to wanting to be a professional basketball player. We've already had the conversation. He is committed, if he becomes a professional basketball player, to stay at Two Cities and to tithe, so we're very excited about this. True story. I'm sowing that seed early.

So, we want to be great. Here's how we are. If you get in a room with somebody and notice they're better than you at something, you often then try to find something you're better at than them. It's called *living in the land of "er"*...smarter, richer, funnier. "Oh, he makes more money, but we have a better family. He has a better job, but I'm in better shape." We just can't help it. We live in the land of "er." Jesus wants to turn this on its head.

Here's the rest of the message. Here's where we're going with the rest of our time. Jesus is going to tell us this: *the greatest life that can be lived is a life in service to others*. If you've been in church any amount of time, you know that's true. We can make the listening noises when we say it, but it's very, very hard to live.

The greatest life that can be lived is a life in service to others. How do we know this? Jesus lived this life. Would anyone want to say, "I've lived a better life than Jesus"? No. Okay. Jesus said his whole life... In fact, Mark 10:45 is the theme verse for all of Mark. We'll get there. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus models this life of service.

Here's another interesting thing. If you meet people... This is probably true with everybody, but it's probably more obvious with really successful people. If you meet really successful people, especially if they're successful and they're over 50... There's

a whole movement (not in the church) called *moving from success to significance*. It's mostly targeted at wealthy business guys.

It's a bunch of guys who realize, "I've made enough money. I have the position. I have the office. My 401(k) is fine. I've got it all. Something is missing." The significant part... The world doesn't even know Christ, but they get this by common grace. The significant part is "Maybe I need to use what I have for other people. Maybe that's what the final quarter of my life needs to be."

If you want to meet a joyful 55- or 60-year-old man or woman, it's somebody who has said, "Maybe my affluence and influence should be used for other people. Maybe what would make me more excited is to find a bunch of people on their way up and just open as many doors as I can for them and help them go as far as they can, as fast as they can. Somehow, nothing makes me more excited."

So, with the time left, Jesus is going to tell us four things a servant does. First, *a servant serves anybody at any time*. That's the heart of a servant. Let me show you. Verse 35: "**And he sat down...**" By the way, that's a posture of authority. "**...and called the twelve. And he said to them, 'If anyone would be first...'**" That's the same as greatest in Jesus' mind. "**...he must be last of all and servant of all.**"

Nobody wants to be last, because we're thinking about being last wrong. We're thinking about last in our culture. We're thinking about the kid who was picked... You always knew this kid in elementary school who got picked last for the dodgeball team. "All right. Joe and Sam and Bob. All right, Tiny Tim, get over here." We don't celebrate them. Why would you celebrate someone who comes in last? You wouldn't do that.

We have the valedictorian. "You know, Sally is valedictorian, and then over there there's Jake. Jake came in dead last, guys, with a D+ average out of 354 students. Jake, you were number 354. Stand and take a bow." We don't do that. I want to say this carefully. Somebody who has to be last... They have no personality. They have no skill set. They're lazy. They have no work ethic.

There's no honoring somebody who's last because they're last. I mean, Jesus loves them, and we feel sorry for them, and we would like to help them, but that's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about somebody who *could* be first but chooses to be last. It's a sacrifice in service to others. Actually, if you think about it, it's who you admire.

I'm not saying we live this way, but who do you admire? You admire the person who you look at and go, "Well, he could use his status for himself, but he doesn't." "She could use her finances completely for herself, but she doesn't." "She could have

somebody else do all that work for her, and she doesn't even need to be in that meeting, but she's in that meeting for the other people."

The idea of being last is kind of like, "I want to get behind you to encourage you and push you. I could be first, and everybody knows it, but I voluntarily and willingly get to the back of the line for the sake of everybody else in the line to go farther faster." Jesus says a servant is willing to serve... Do you see? "Last of all and servant of all."

So, what does it mean to serve all? Guys, we couldn't serve our whole city. There are 250,000 people. We couldn't even serve every person... It would take you years to individually serve every person in our church. There are hundreds of people in our church. So, how do you apply a verse that says, "Servant of all." Here's how to apply it: you need to serve the person you least want to serve.

Who is he? Who is she? Your mother-in-law? It's about to be Thanksgiving. It's about to be Christmas. I know she's a little different. She doesn't do everything with the kids the way you would do it with the kids. How about spouses? Could we serve our spouses? Some people's marriages are unbelievably hard. So many marriages have so many bad memories in them. "Well, she never..." "He always..."

There's the cycle of disrespect and lack of love and disrespect and lack of love and disrespect and lack of love. You break the cycle through service. How about serving your kids? The principle of serving your kids is you go to them because they can't come to you. When they get older, it means you visit them. You go to them. When they're young, it means you get on the ground because they can't come to you.

You get into their world because they can't engage your world. It's the principle of service. What would it look like if everyone in here decided "There's one person I need to serve"? Maybe it's the person who every time she calls, you go, "No!" Maybe that's the person you need to serve. A servant is willing to serve anybody, especially the person they least want to serve.

Look at what happens next. Verse 36: **"And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms..."** By the way, many people believe this is Peter's kid. He's in Capernaum where Peter lived. He's in a house, most likely Peter's house. He grabs a kid. This kid feels comfortable enough with Jesus grabbing him and hugging him and using him as an example, so he knew him.

Verse 37: **"...he said to them, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.'"** Jesus associates himself with the least and last and lowly of our culture. Children back then were thought of very differently than today. We think children are cute. We love them. We get excited to see them.

Back then, because of the high child mortality rates, they did not get very excited about children until they got much older, until they were able to be a working part of the family. So, this is very different, because in most religions, God is the God of the powerful and the wise and the famous and the popular. Jesus says, "Actually, I'm going to associate myself and connect myself with the least of society."

02 A SERVANT CARES ABOUT THE KINGDOM MORE THAN ANY ONE CHURCH...

Here's the second thing a servant does. Let's see. Verse 38. John is trying to change the subject. This is what you do when you get uncomfortable when someone is teaching you something or telling you something: you change the subject. John says, "**Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, [but don't worry,] we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.**" Jesus is about to say in a minute, "Why were you stopping him?"

Here's the other thing a servant does: *a servant has a win-win mentality, not a win-lose mentality*. There's something called a *zero-sum game*. A zero-sum game is a way of thinking. It's a mentality, and it basically says, "If you win, I have to lose. There's not enough. If you win, it's a threat to me, and I have to lose, or in order for me to win, you have to lose." That's the win-lose mentality.

You see it here. Here's what I think happened here. The disciples have this realization, "Okay. Among each other we need to serve each other, and we shouldn't be first among each other." Then they look outside the Twelve and say, "But we are better than everybody else, right?" This is what's called *tribalism*. If you want to ruin something, you add an "ism" to it. There's traditionalism. There's tribalism.

John says, "Hey, there was this guy, and he was casting out a demon." Well, that's a good thing. "And he was doing it in your name." Well, that's a good thing. He says, "But he wasn't following us." Jesus is like, "Well, was he following me?" "Oh, yeah. He was following you, but he wasn't following us."

What happens with tribalism is we think the way we do things...our team, our tribe, our tradition...is the best, and we look down on all other nonprofits or churches or parachurch ministries. It's called *tribalism*. Now here's the truth. As a Christian, you need to find a tribe. You need to find a team. You need to find a tradition. You need to say, "This is my church. This is my denomination. This is my network."

The truth is we can learn a lot from good gospel-preaching churches and denominations that are very different than ours. Why do we have the charismatics?

Because they remind us that the Holy Spirit is alive and well. Have you ever met a charismatic? They remind you that God is at work. They remind you that the Christian life is not static, that God is personal and is still working in people's lives. It's like, "Thank God for the charismatics."

What do we get from the Presbyterians? That we should love God with all of our minds, and we should think deeply about God's Word. What do we learn, historically, from the Methodists? They were called the *Methodists*. We learn the importance of discipline, personal piety, and personal holiness. You learn that historically from the Methodists.

What do we learn from the Anglicans? Tradition, awe, reverence, and fear of God. What do we learn from the Baptists? The importance of mission and that baptism is a big deal. What do we learn from the non-denominationalists? Well, a non-denominational church is just a Baptist church with a better website. That's it. So, we learn the same thing from the non-denominationalists as we learn from the Baptists.

The whole point is we need to learn from everyone. Let me show you this. Look at what happens in verse 39. Jesus responds. ***"But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him...'"*** We rejoice every time darkness is defeated. We rejoice every time the gospel goes forward. We rejoice every time someone receives the help, hope, and healing of Christ.

"Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward."

This is the heart of collaboration: a win-win mentality as we look at every other church in our city that's a good gospel-preaching church. We want them to win. We want people to come to Christ. We think it takes all types of churches to reach all types of people. My own rule is I'm *the* pastor of *a* church (that's my primary calling), and then I'm *a* pastor of *the* church as a larger calling.

Now, here's what has happened, if we can kind of tell you the ugly underbelly of the church world. Every industry, every organization, every business has an underbelly, has a negative side to it. What happens in most churches in America is all of the churches in one city are fighting over the small number of Christians left in that city. Interestingly enough, the more secular a city becomes, the more collaborative churches become. It's true.

You go to New York City. You go to Boston. Oh man! All of the churches are collaborating. It's like, "There are no Christians here. Each of us has, like, 100 people

in our church. Help us do evangelism." The closer you get to the Bible Belt, to a city in the Southeast, to someplace in Texas, to certain parts of Southern California, it's churches fighting over the small number of Christians left in those cities and forgetting about all of the lost people.

So, the first thing a servant does is a servant is willing to serve anybody, especially the person they least want to serve. The second thing a servant does is a servant has a win-win mentality. We serve a God of an abundance. You don't have to lose for me to win. I don't have to lose for you to win.

03 A SERVANT IS CONCERNED WITH NEW BELIEVERS & THE NEXT GENERATION

The third thing a servant does is *a servant cares for the next generation*. Look at verse 42. **"Whoever causes one of these little ones..."** That's a child, or you could say by extension a new believer. **"Whoever causes one of these little ones [children] who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone [which weighed 100 pounds] were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."** Yikes! That's what we should say.

I mean, this really happened. This was another way Romans killed people. They were experts at killing people. Imagine this happening to you. You're supposed to be shocked. You're like, "Okay, I don't want this to happen." What would happen was when they threw you off the bridge, your neck broke. You were too heavy to lift already, but you were also paralyzed, and then you drowned by suffocation, obviously, at the bottom of the sea.

We should all be repulsed and go, "That's the worst. Jesus, why are you using such a graphic illustration?" Because he's explaining something very important. He's saying that would be better to happen to you than for you to lead a child into sin. Yikes! So I thought about that. We have to be more sophisticated about sin. Not all sin is the same. All sin is the same in the sense that it dishonors God. All sin is the same in that it will be punished, but not all sin is the same.

For example, it's one thing to struggle with unbelief, to have your questions and to do your own spiritual seeking journey and to wrestle with God. It's another thing to be a public atheist who, for a living, tries to convince other people not to believe in God. There were what they called the *four horsemen of atheism*. (There are only three left.) They write books.

In 2011, Christopher Hitchens, who's very famous and wrote a ton of books, died still claiming atheism on his deathbed. I remember when he died and I got the message. I thought, "I hope he repented." You do not want to face the final judgment as somebody who was, for your life and for your living, leading other people into sin.

It's one thing to look at pornography. It's a sin. You talk to people. At different times in their lives, they have this struggle. God frees them from it. They repent of it. It's one thing to look at pornography. It's another thing to create pornography, to be in the pornography industry, to be a pornographer, to create violent, degrading sex that you put on the Internet for other people to get addicted and confused.

Jesus is saying, "We save the hottest places in hell for these people." It's one thing to go to college and wrestle with your faith. It's another to have professors on the college campus who think it's their job to dismantle an 18- or 19-year-old's faith that their family spent 15 to 20 years investing in them. Pastors do this. They knowingly and willingly don't teach things in the Bible that people need to hear.

You have a whole set of these churches. If you see the Pride flag, Jesus has taken the lamp out of that church. It's gone. People are unwilling to say, "Jesus died for this. You need to repent of that." Everything I mentioned actually isn't the biggest issue of what's happening in our culture today. All that's terrible, and all that's sad, and all that we need to be awake and aware of, but the most serious thing is what's happening to our children right now.

I'm not a doomsday person at all. I'm not given to extremes. I try to be very tempered and try to see things from multiple angles, and all that, but the more I've watched, the more I've talked to other pastors, especially in larger cities and cities where we're heading... You look at where Charlotte is. You look at where Raleigh is. There is a sexual agenda for our children. I just want to spend a few minutes talking about this, because it's a big deal.

I want to show you an image of the Gender Unicorn. Have you ever seen this? Now, you look at a picture like that. It's a sexually confused Barney. That's basically what it is. You look at it and go, "Was this drawn to convince me?" No. Was this drawn to convince a high schooler? You don't draw that picture to convince a high schooler. Who was this drawn to convince? Elementary school students. There's also the Genderbread Person. Maybe you've heard of it.

What's happening here is that they're going after our kids. The only good thing we can say about Satan is he's predictable. We know what he does. Here's Satan's strategy from the garden: isolate and then indoctrinate. "I need to isolate Eve from Adam and then indoctrinate her. I need to get people alone, and I need to introduce ambiguity into their lives."

I believe Satan's great strategy is somehow to separate parents from their children when their children are very young and then to indoctrinate and introduce ambiguity into their lives. There are many reasons this is happening, but what the Gender Unicorn is... They have categories now that sex is different than gender, which is different than sexuality, and they're all on a spectrum.

I heard a story of this one elementary school. I think it was in Arizona. First day of second grade, the students go in. Instead of names on their desks there are rainbows. You're supposed to move your little image on the rainbow where you are that day on the gender fluid spectrum, and then you pick your pronoun based on your gender fluidity of that day. (This is second graders.) Then you go around the room introducing yourself and talking to one another with your new pronouns.

What is this? Theologians talk about truth, lies, and anti-truth. *Truth* is that which corresponds to reality. It's the Word of God. *Lies* are when you slightly deviate from the truth. In fact, you don't want to be a good liar, but if you're a good liar, you know how to just deviate slightly from the truth so it's kind of hard to tell, "Was that true or not true?"

Then there is what's called *anti-truth*. *Anti-truth* is literally the farthest thing from the truth, the exact opposite thing of the truth. The most fundamental thing about you and me, after we're created in God's image, is that we're male and female. Number one is God created them in his own image, male and female.

I don't know how attractive Adam and Eve were. I don't know how tall they were. I don't know how much they weighed. I don't know their ethnicity. I know they were male and female. That's all I need to know. We live in a culture right now that's trying to confuse our children about their sexuality.

I think what's behind a lot of it is pornography. It's decades of people soaking their minds in weird, demented sexual fantasies online, watching way too much pornography, watching a bunch of people, both their gender and the opposite gender, have sex with each other. It messes with their minds.

So, the guy behind the Gender Unicorn and the Genderbread Person is a guy named Foucault. Look him up sometime. He was a pedophile. He died of AIDS. He is their founder. So, if you ever talk to somebody who's interested... "No, the Gender Unicorn thing is a good thing." "Can I just tell you who the founder is? A pedophile who died of AIDS. His name is Foucault."

This is why we are as committed as ever to our kids' ministry, to our student ministry, to coming alongside our kids, and to giving them a more compelling vision and telling them a better story. Thank you for your generosity, because this new

building is going to be a home and hub for our student ministry. This word has been hijacked, but it's going to be a safe place, and I mean that in the biblical sense of the word. It's going to be a place where we're going to walk with people, and we are going to help to reorient their lives if they've been taught lies.

We have an incredible student ministry, and we have a lot of people working very, very hard, so thank you to those of you who volunteer in our kids' ministry, in our student ministry. This is a battle. This is what it means to serve. We are going to fight the battles our kids can't fight. They're not ready to be sent out in the war, so we're going to have to fight the wars for them.

The first thing a servant does is serves anybody, especially the person you don't want to serve. The second thing a servant does is a servant has a win-win mentality, not a win-lose mentality. The third thing is a servant is willing to fight the battles for the next generation.

04 A SERVANT SERVES HIMSELF BY FIGHTING SIN

Finally, *a servant serves his or her future self*. Have you ever had this thought? You're a community across time. You can look to your past, and you're like, "Oh, yeah. There was 12-year-old me, and there was 22-year-old me, and now there's 35-year-old me. I'm a community across time."

The principle Jesus gives us is you need to think of your future self, and you need to make decisions today that your future self is going to be happy about. He's not talking about 5 or 10 years from now. He's going to talk about hell. He's talking about 500 years from now. Look at what he says. These are the hardest words that Jesus says, even harder than the millstone. Here's what he says in verse 43:

"And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'"

Jesus ends by talking about hell. Now, if Jesus didn't talk about hell, I don't think we'd believe in it. If it was just the Old Testament, we'd say, "Well, New Testament and new covenant and grace." If it was just in Paul's epistles or Peter's epistles, we'd probably be like, "Well, I don't know. Maybe we can re-interpret this," but it comes out of the mouth of Jesus.

Jesus talks about hell more than he talks about heaven. Jesus talks about hell not as a place you want to go. It's not talked about as an all-inclusive resort. In fact, the word he uses is *gehenna*. This is interesting. In Israel's history, they had a really dark moment. Just for a small season, they practiced child sacrifice. This was a long time ago in the Old Testament. They were influenced by their culture.

I can't remember what king it was. One of the good kings in the Old Testament comes around, and he fixes up all of Israel. He gets to where they did child sacrifice, and he basically says, "This cannot be redeemed. Turn it into a trash heap." So, it became a place where they took their trash and burned their trash.

We have a very modern life where we're like, "I don't know where my trash goes. I put it out Wednesday. They take it away. The bin is empty. It's amazing." Well, back then, they had to take all their trash... Everybody was familiar with what *gehenna* was, because they took their trash there. It was always on fire because there was always new trash happening. The way they got rid of their trash was burning it. So the smells and the images of *gehenna* would be there.

Jesus says you need to think about your future self, not just where you're going to be in 5 years but where you're going to be in 500 years, and you need to make decisions today for that future self. Now, here's the temptation: what you want now versus what you want most. Why do you give back into sin? Because he was gone, and it was late, and just for that one time you wanted to choose what you wanted now versus what the best part of you wanted most.

So, Jesus says, "Tear your eye out. Cut your hand off. Cut your foot off." Why? Your eye is what you see. Your hand is what you do. Your foot is where you go. He says in your life, there are some things you're going to have to cut off and throw away. Why your foot? Why your hand? Why your eye? Deuteronomy 14 says, "Don't self-mutilate." He's not actually telling us to do that. We know that.

What he's telling you is it's going to be as painful as that to you. It's going to be something you love and something you don't want to get rid of, and you're going to need to cut it off and throw it away. Here's what we call this in counseling: *extreme measures*. This will help us all be better counselors.

The next thing you do if somebody is struggling with a sin, after you make sure everybody is safe (that's number one), is say, "Okay, time to take extreme measures. No more iPad for you. No more Internet at your house. No more traveling. Your girlfriend is now an ex-girlfriend. No more alcohol in the house ever." You have to do the extreme measures because the extreme measures leave the space to do everything else.

"Oh, thank God. Now I need to meet with a counselor, and now I need accountability, and now I need to pray. Now I need to confess. Now I need Scripture memory. Now I need to go to A.A." Okay, great, but the first thing you do is take extreme measures. This is what Jesus has for us. He says if you're really going to believe that the greatest life that can be lived is a life in service to others, then you have to do these four things.

Here's my question: What would it look like if we all did this? What would it look like if everybody left here today and texted someone they need to serve and just made a plan to serve the person in their life they least want to serve? What if every marriage and every family... Maybe it's just in your own mind as you walk into work. You think of your coworkers. You think of your classmates. You go, "No more win-lose mentality here. I want to have a win-win mentality."

For some of you, it's going to be, "I need to start inviting some people into my parenting because I don't know what's going on in my kids' lives, and I'm not sure how to stop it. When do they get a phone? When do they get an iPad? Do they get that? What are the problems and pressures middle schoolers are going through? I need to be more aware of these things. I can't protect something I don't know about." Then each of us just needs to decide, "Okay, I need to start deciding that I want to do what I want most versus what I want right this moment."

It's hard to talk about greatness. It's hard to explain it. It's hard to articulate it, so I want to show you a painting. This is a painting that came out in 1883. If you can't see it very well on the screen, you can Google it later and look at it. It's called *The Missionary's Adventures*. It was painted as a critique on the church at the time.

What's happening in the picture is a missionary... See that guy in the middle? He's dressed in black. He has come to talk about the need to serve the nations. He has come back, and if you can look at his hand, he's showing the scars from his service to the nations. All around him are professional ministers who have become worldly.

They're sitting in a really, really big house, and they're doing two things. They're not paying attention to the missionary. You can see the two guys on the couch are just sitting there, bored. The two guys behind are laughing at each other about some joke, telling something else. The other guy is staring at his coffee cup. They don't realize they have completely forgotten the mission.

What's interesting is this is a painting that has a painting within it. The painting within is actually a very famous painting. It's called *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*. It has been a moving and motivating picture for generations that the church should serve. Everybody's back is to it, and no one is looking at it.

The great fear is, as a church is fruitful and as a nation is successful, we start looking like the two guys in red sitting on the couch. We forget that if you want a picture of greatness, it's the guy in the middle talking about mission, showing the scars of his suffering. Let's not forget that. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that picture over us, that that image would be imprinted on our minds. As a nation prospers or as a family prospers, it's so easy to begin to live in comfort and ease and somehow, like the men in that picture, make Christianity all about us and how great we are and how we've arrived.

Really, the great person in that picture is the missionary with no name who has suffered for Christ who's trying to remind a people of what true greatness is and true service is. Lord, would you remind us this morning afresh that the greatest life that can be lived is a life in service to others? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.