



CHRIST, CULTURE, AND A CALL TO ACTION

Introduction

Good evening. I want to welcome you to Secret Church in a way I did not plan on doing when I woke up this morning. As many of you know, earlier today we received a security threat regarding our event tonight at The Church at Brook Hills, and as we investigated that, we believed that it would be best to cancel the live event at that location, to help people who were going there to find a location where they could be part of this simulcast, and simulcast instead from a secret location.

So, that's where I'm at right now. Today, Secret Church became all the more secret, as we got a small taste—I mean, a very small taste—of what our brothers and sisters experience around the world when they gather together in underground locations amidst many threats. In fact, tonight we are going to learn about and pray specifically for the church in Communist Vietnam where, of the 90 million people, less than 2% are Christian. We're going to hear some stories later about how they are threatened in many different ways as they live out their faith in Vietnam.

Here's the deal. We see this all over the New Testament. Suffering, opposition, persecution, even threats are to be expected by the church—not sought out in any way, but expected. But here's the beauty. All throughout Scripture we see God using all these things—suffering, opposition, persecution and threats—for the furtherance of the gospel. In other words, none of these things can stop the spread of the Word of God. Not here tonight. Not in Vietnam.

This is the testimony of saints throughout history and all over Scripture. You can't stop the Word of God, and the church of God that believes the Word of God. The world's opposition may be inevitable, but the church's mission is unstoppable. We know the end of the story—Jesus wins. Period. He wins. Which means from this day until that day, all of Satan's strategies to stop the church will only serve to spread the church.

Tonight, the only difference is we won't have music with this small group in here, because if we did music, that would mean I would be leading. And that would not be profitable for the church. So, music is off, but everything else is the same. We're going to dive into the Word here with a very small group in this room, and join together with 50,000+ other people in 50 states—thank you, Rhode Island,

for joining in yesterday—and then 100+ countries, more countries than we’ve ever had. We’re going to dive into the Word together, and we’re going to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

Here’s how I want us to start. I mentioned that we’re going to pray specifically for Vietnam tonight. We’re going to hear a little bit more about Vietnam in a minute. But right now, while we’re gathering, we have brothers and sisters in Vietnam who know that there are 50,000+ people gathering together to pray for them. So they have organized a concentrated effort to go out over the next six hours and to share the gospel on the streets of Vietnam. While we’re gathered right now, they’re going right now.

I share that with you from the beginning, because all throughout the night—if you start to fall asleep—wake up and pray for them. Let it just come to your mind to pray for them all throughout the night. Let’s get the picture. As they go out into Vietnam over the next six hours sharing the gospel amidst threats against them, and we gather in light of a threat against this, let’s pray that the Word would get spread here, and let’s pray that the Word would get spread in Vietnam.

Let’s start that way tonight. Bow together with me and let’s pray. I want to read Acts 4:29-31. All day long as things developed, this is the text that has come to my mind over and over again. Let this inform our prayer. The New Testament church prayed this way:

“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

God, we pray for that. We pray that in light of threat here today and in light of threats our brothers and sisters will face over the next six hours in Vietnam. We pray that You would enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness. We pray for those brothers and sisters in Vietnam. We pray that You’d give them boldness, that You’d give them strength and power from Your Holy Spirit to speak Your Word. And God, we pray that over the next six hours there would be people in Vietnam who come to faith in Christ. Do what You did in Acts 16: open people’s hearts to believe, just like You did Lydia’s there. Open their hearts to believe.

We pray that You would give courage to the church there as they go out, and as we together right now—50,000+ of us—are lifting this prayer to you. Hear 50,000 hearts saying, “God, give them power.” We pray You would answer with power on them in Vietnam. Give them success, so that Your Word would spread through them over the next six hours, despite threats that may come their way.

Even here, as we have this gathering in a secret location as a result of a threat, God, we pray for the people who posed that threat. We pray that You would please forgive them, as they don’t know what

they do. Show them Your grace and Your mercy. We pray that some way You might even use this to bring them face to face with Your love for them. Just as you did Paul in Acts 9, we pray that You would open their eyes to see Your beauty and Your mercy and that You would draw them to Yourself.

We pray for Your Spirit's anointing on this room I'm in right now and on thousands of different homes and church buildings people are in. Over the next six hours, God, I pray that, like in Acts 4, these places would shake with an unmistakable sense of Your presence and that You would do a supernatural work through Your Word in 50,000+ hearts—all in a way that resounds to the glory of Your name. Draw people in this gathering—among all these churches and all these homes—to Yourself tonight. Edify and build up Your church and make Your greatness known. Toward this end we pray from the start, in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, we've got a lot of ground to cover, so let's get going. For those who are new to Secret Church, here are a couple of ground rules. I hope you've chosen wisely the person you're sitting next to, because you're going to need them tonight. If they're a frequent dozer or not good listeners or good note takers, you're going to be at a significant disadvantage, because you're going to need them. So look around the room in your house or church building. It's not too late—you may want to make a switch. Don't be offended if somebody gets up right now and walks away from you.

Second, I want to make a disclaimer from the start. We're going to be covering some issues tonight that are sensitive and may not be suitable for young audiences. This is PG13 Secret Church. We tried to get that word out in advance, but I just want to reiterate it here at the beginning. We're going to dive into some adult themes. I know that different ages come to Secret Church, so you might wonder what age is appropriate. I hesitate to answer that, but we recommend at least 13. Obviously it's up to parents or student ministers on this one.

If you have any questions or concerns, let me encourage you to peruse that study guide which will give you a pretty good idea of what we're going to cover and when. If you feel the need at any point to step out or press "pause" or whatever, that's obviously understandable. I feel like I'm building up this anticipation—"Man, this is going to be a juicy one!" Some of you may be disappointed. It might not be as juicy as you are imagining. But I do want to help us parent well and to equip student ministers and pastors to think through when they're ready to have certain conversations or when they're not.

Finally, you should have a rather thick study guide in front of you. The goal of that guide is multifaceted. First, obviously, it's to guide our time together tonight. We're going to be all over God's Word. We don't have time to turn to all these different texts, so this will keep us going. Second, that guide is intended to equip you to be able to go back and soak in all we walk through tonight. Secret Church is designed to be like drinking from a fire hydrant. People say, "You should slow down and cover

less information, as that would help people to better process it.” Well, you have a year to process this before we do it again. I’ve got six hours or a little more to give it to you. We’re going to move fast.

The ultimate reason for this guide in front of you and the notes it contains is that you’re not just listening for yourself tonight. Our goal is definitively NOT to gather together 50-60,000 people for a nice Bible study in which you are entertained. The goal tonight is not entertainment. The goal is equipping. Amidst a rapidly shifting moral landscape in the culture around those of us who are in the United States especially, and the mammoth implications of these cultural issues, the goal is to equip you to know and to speak and to obey God’s Word where He has placed you. May tens of thousands of people walk away tonight filled with the Word of God and empowered by the Spirit of God to proclaim the gospel of God in the culture where you live and in cultures around the world. That’s why we’re here.

Without further ado, strap your seatbelt on and let’s go!

See the Culture Around Us

We’ll start by seeing the culture around us. We’ll be going quickly in a way that I hope overwhelms us with the sheer magnitude of the cultural issues that we’re diving into tonight.

Abortion

Over 42 million abortions occur every year worldwide. That’s more than 115,000 abortions every day. At least one woman has an abortion every second of every day. In the United States alone over 45 million abortions have occurred since 1973—1.4 million abortions every year, 3,000 abortions every day.

This next statistic is a staggering reality. I double and triple fact-checked this one. One-third of American women have an abortion at some point in their lives. I do not believe it’s an overstatement to call abortion a modern holocaust. I believe that’s an understatement. Every month, we in the United States surpass that number of people systematically slaughtered in the world. Just as German Christians did not need to hide from what was happening in concentration camps around them, we cannot—we must not—hide from the reality of what is happening in abortion clinics all across our country and around the world.

Orphans and Widows

Second, orphans and widows. Approximately 153 million children live as orphans, meaning they’ve lost at least one parent. That number includes 18 million children who have lost both parents. And follow this—that number does not include the millions of effectively orphaned children who live in institutions or on the streets. In addition, others live as “social orphans,” children who rarely see their parents or experience life as part of a family.

Then widows. Approximately 245 million women live as widows in the world. About 115 million of them live in significant economic deprivation and/or social isolation as a result of being a widow. I'm already throwing out numbers here—hundreds of millions here or there—but remember, these massive numbers represent individual people just like you, just like me. And some of them are you—orphans or widows.

Poverty

Let's keep going. Poverty. Today over a billion people live and die in desperate poverty, on less than a dollar a day. Over one billion. Again, picture those individual people. Seven hundred million of them are in slums or urban pockets lined with hundreds of thousands of people crammed into small shacks and shanties. Five hundred million are on the verge of starvation. When we're hungry, we say, "I'm starving." No, you're not—but 500 million people are. Ninety-three million are beggars. Two hundred million children are exported for labor—children who are often the silent victims of poverty. They're exploited, used, abused and discarded.

When we say "desperate poverty," we mean they lack food and water, or at least clean water. They are illiterate. And they have inadequate medical care for some of the most basic illnesses. We're not talking about high-level surgery—we're talking about treatment for stomach problems which we simply get over-the-counter pills for, but which kill them because they can't get the pills. One of most devastating pictures of poverty in the world is permanent brain damage caused by protein deficiency. Eighty percent of protein development happens in the brain in the first two years of life. If you don't have sufficient protein then, you pay for it with a malformed brain the rest of your life.

That's the one billion. Then there's the over two billion others who live on less than two dollars a day. The devastating reality is that more than 18,000 children will die today due to either starvation or a preventable disease. Just to put that in perspective, if you do the math, if this were happening to the children of parents who are gathering for Secret Church tonight, all of our kids would be dead within the week. But by God's grace, most of our kids aren't, and the reason is because we are not among these billions. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert point out:

While the average American lives on more than 90 dollars per day, approximately one billion people live on less than one dollar per day and 2.6 billion—40 percent of the world's population—live on less than two dollars per day The Bible's teachings should cut to the heart of North American Christians. By any measure, we are the richest people ever to walk on planet Earth. Furthermore, at no time in history has there ever been greater economic disparity in the world than at the present.

Slavery

Next is slavery. Over 27 million people live in slavery today, which is more than any other time in history. There are more slaves today than were seized from Africa in four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Today! Many of these millions are bought, sold and exploited for sex in what has become one of the fastest-growing industries on earth. Sex trafficking is a multi-billion dollar industry worldwide.

Just get the picture. A human trafficker can earn 20 times what he or she paid for a girl. Provided the girl was not physically brutalized to the point of ruining her beauty, the pimp could sell her again for a greater price, because he's trained her and broken her spirit, which saves future buyers the hassle. One study in the Netherlands found on average a single sex slave earned her pimp at least \$250,000 a year. Sex traffickers use a variety of ways to "condition" their victims, including subjecting them to starvation, rape, gang rape, physical abuse, beating, confinement, threats of violence toward the victim and the victim's family, forced drug use and shame. These victims suffer devastating physical and psychological harm.

However, due to language barriers, lack of knowledge about available services and the frequency in which traffickers move human trafficking victims and their perpetrators, they are difficult to catch. It's one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises because it holds relatively low risk with such a high profit potential. Over the past 30 years, according to UNICEF, over 30 million children have been sexually exploited through human trafficking. I've seen this on the streets of Nepal. I've seen this on the sex trafficking highway known as Interstate 20 that runs right through Birmingham, Alabama.

Marriage

In our culture, nearly half of all first marriages will end in divorce. Over the past 30 years, the number of cohabiting couples has nearly quadrupled. Over the past 40 years the number of independent female households in the United States grew by 65% and independent male households by 120%. As a result, fewer than half of all American households today are made up of married couples. So marriage is now officially in the minority—and marriage for a lifetime is a major minority.

Pornography

On top of all these other issues, pornography—which is not just rampant in the culture but also in the church. Based on statistics, I am confident that there are thousands of men and a good number of women participating in Secret Church right now who have visited pornographic sites over the last week—or last night—or earlier today. And I'm praying that the power of the gospel will change that for thousands of people tonight.

Racial Strife—from Ferguson in the United States to ethnic cleansing overseas. Illegal immigration. Decreasing liberty.

Increasing Persecution of Christians

Videos of beheadings are now commonplace. Christians face persecution of some kind in more than 60 different countries today. At least 100 Christians around the world are killed every month for their faith in Christ. That's a low estimate, but at least 100 every month. Countless others are persecuted through all these other means.

Lack of Gospel Access

Then on top of this—what I'm going to maintain at the end of tonight—is the greatest injustice of all: the lack of gospel access for approximately two billion people in the world who have never even heard how much God loves them and they're on a road that leads to an eternal hell—and nobody's even told them how they can go to heaven.

Hear Christ's Call To Us

So just see it. Just try to get a perspective on the world around us, and then hear Christ's call to us. In the words of Mordecai to Esther in their day, *"Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). If I could try to speak to 50,000+ people individually for just a minute, right where you are sitting, God has put you and me in this time and this place for a reason. He could have put any one of us in a number of other times or places—but in His sovereign design, He's put you here right now and me here right now.

Not To Accommodate

And He's put us here not to accommodate—in other words, not to become like the world. We have a clear word from God in Scripture: *"Do not love the world or the things in the world"* (1 John 2:15). All of us are tempted to love the world and the things in the world. C.J. Mahaney is right. "Today, the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world." Listen to the call of Francis Schaeffer, decades ago, a generation before us:

We need a young generation and others who will be willing to stand in loving confrontation, but real confrontation, in contrast to the mentality of constant accommodation with the current forms of the world spirit as they surround us today.

Again, this was decades before now. But listen to how he talks about the sexual revolution. He said:

If we look at many of our evangelical leaders and at much of our evangelical literature we find the same destructive views on divorce, extreme feminism, and even homosexuality as we find in the world Evangelicalism is deeply infiltrated with the world spirit of our age when it comes to marriage and sexual morality There are those who call themselves evangelicals and who are among evangelical leadership who completely deny the biblical pattern for male and female relationships in the home and church. There are many who accept the idea of equality without distinction and deliberately set aside what the Scriptures teach at this point. And there are others who call themselves evangelical and then affirm the acceptability of homosexuality and even the idea of homosexual 'marriage.'... The idea of absolute, autonomous freedom from God's boundaries flows into the idea of equality without distinction, which flows into the denial of what it truly means to be male and female, which flows into abortion and homosexuality, and the destruction of the home and the family, and ultimately the destruction of our culture.

What prophetic words! Listen to Spurgeon, decades before him:

I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church Put your finger on any prosperous page in the Church's history, and [you] will find a little marginal note [that says]: "In this age [people] could readily see where the Church began and where the world ended."

We live in a day when it's hard to see where the world ends and the church begins. Instead of countering the culture, we imitate the culture. God in His Word, in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7, is shouting, "Come out and be separate!" !"

Nor To Acquiesce

We're not to accommodate the world, nor are we to acquiesce. In other words, we don't isolate ourselves from the culture in virtual indifference when it comes to these issues. We don't stick our heads in the sand, nor do we just sit back and wring our hands in pious concern, saying, "Look at all that's going wrong in the world."

Look at Ezekiel 33:8: "*[If] you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.*" Did you hear that? God's people do not have the option of sitting back and staying silent. This is huge. This is one of the primary burdens that compelled me to address this topic tonight and to write a book recently on these issues.

When I look out at the church in our culture, on one hand I'm encouraged to see many Christians passionate about social issues like poverty or sex trafficking or the orphan crisis. These are things we need to be passionate about. What's concerning to me, though, is that so many of the same evangelical Christians who are passionate about those issues are passive about issues like so-called same sex marriage or abortion—issues that are just as, if not in some ways more, important to address.

I fear that one of the reasons we're passionate about some issues is because they're popular in the culture around us, and we'll be applauded for addressing them. If you speak out on poverty and sex trafficking, you will be applauded in our culture. But if you speak out on same sex marriage and abortion, you will be crucified in our culture. Yet here's what Ezekiel and all of Scripture are saying: followers of Christ don't have the option of picking and choosing which social issues we're to stand up and speak out on and which ones we're to sit down and be silent on based on what's most comfortable and least costly to us in the culture around us. Ezekiel says we have a responsibility and obligation to speak truth with grace and love, yet urgency, in the culture around us.

But To Act

We're not to accommodate or acquiesce, but to act. Matthew 5:13-16 says we're to be salt and light in the world, to act with conviction and confidence in the Word. Here's the deal. We are involved in a spiritual war. Make no mistake about it. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12). We have an adversary who *"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). We're involved in a spiritual war, which means we must battle with spiritual weapons—namely, the Word of God (2 Corinthians 10) and the character of Christ, which is what the armor of God in Ephesians 6 is all about.

So let's hear God's Word. Let's hear it. My aim tonight is to saturate this time with the God-breathed words of Scripture so that He might teach us. We are in a day like Paul foretold in 2 Timothy 4 when people don't endure sound teaching, when they have itching ears that accumulate teachers who soothe their own passions, and when they wander from the Word. Let me state the obvious—it's become very clear today—there are more popular things I could be talking about tonight.

But here's the deal. As I speak, I know the Word is my only source of authority. I have credibility to speak on these issues only as long as my words are tied to His Word. This is so huge. It's just a reminder for us tonight—a preacher's authority is not personal. This is not me saying I've got all these answers to all of culture's issues. I'm not even saying I'm an expert on all these things: immigration, poverty, sexuality or sex trafficking.

But this is what's so important. My authority to speak on these issues is not based on me nor is it personal. It's also not organizational. I don't represent a certain organization or political group where I'm holding to a party line. My authority isn't intellectual and doesn't depend on how smart I am. It's not psychological. I'm not Dr. Phil or Dr. Dave, here to solve all of culture's problems with my psychological expertise.

My authority is not experiential, based on what I've personally experienced. This is big. Sometimes people say, "Well, a preacher shouldn't talk about something he hasn't experienced." Really? Does that mean I can't speak on divorce because I'm still married? Or that I don't know how to address homosexuality or polygamy or abortion? Clearly that's not true. No, a preacher's authority is only biblical. I only have authority to speak to you tonight on these issues if my words are tied to His Word—which is why you have a Study Guide filled with His Word. His Word is my source of authority, and the Word is ours—so together, it is our ultimate source of accountability.

That means I am and you are accountable before God for listening to His Word and then responding to it. Isaiah 66:2 says, *"This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."* If you go to 2 Timothy 2:1-2, *"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

Again, you're accountable for doing something with what you're hearing tonight from God's Word. It's not just for you. You being a part of this night and listening to God's Word creates a responsibility in you to pass this Word on to others, not to stay silent—Ezekiel 33—but to speak the truth you hear. You're accountable to listen to what He says and to communicate what He says.

So let's hear God's Word, and second, let's believe God Word. This is so important. Let's be careful not to twist it, which is exactly what is happening across the supposedly Christian and church landscape today. People are just throwing out the Bible. Retired Bishop John Shelby Spong says the Ten Commandments are based on "nothing less than the tribal prejudices, stereotypes, and limited knowledge of the people who created them. [Consequently] Biblical sexual standards need to be exposed immediately as immoral and removed from the ethical guidelines that any of us today would seek to follow." Just take them out.

Or consider the words feminist advocate Naomi Goldenberg, who herself acknowledges that people on her side of things within the church don't know what they're doing. She writes:

The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. Yet very few of the women and men now working ... [to change sexual morality] within Christianity and Judaism realize the extent of their heresy They understand themselves to be improving the practice of their religions I do not agree The reforms that Christian and Jewish women are proposing are major departures from tradition. When feminists succeed in changing the position of women in Christianity and Judaism they will shake these religions to their roots.

She's right. So many people in the church are twisting the truth of God's Word, not realizing they're undercutting the very foundation of their faith. This is why Cyprian—long ago amidst great persecution of the church in his day—said this:

It is not persecution alone that we ought to fear, not those forces that in open warfare range abroad to overthrow and defeat the servants of God. It is easy enough to be on one's guard when the danger is obvious; one can stir up one's courage for the fight when the Enemy shows himself in his true colors. There is more need to fear and beware of the Enemy when he creeps up secretly, when he beguiles us by a show of peace and steals forward by those hidden approaches which have earned him the name of the 'Serpent.' ... Those whom he has failed to keep in the blindness of their old [pagan] ways he beguiles, and leads them up a new road of illusion. He snatches away people from within the Church herself, and while they think that coming close to the light they have now done with the night of the world, he plunges them unexpectedly into darkness of another kind. They still call themselves Christians after abandoning the Gospel of Christ and the observance of His [moral] law; though walking in darkness they think they still enjoy the light.

Let's be careful not to twist God's Word. Let's be intentional to trust it for what it says, not for what we want it to say. You will find yourself hearing the Word of God tonight and saying, "I want to believe differently. That doesn't sound right to me in light of everything else we hear in our culture." So I exhort you from the start, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5), as if you know better than God Himself what is best for your life or the world around you.

Let's hear God's Word, let's believe God's Word, and let's obey God's Word. Let's not be content with mere information in our minds as a result of tonight. Let's be about transformation in our lives, our marriages, our families and our churches for our culture. "*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (James 1:22). Christ calls us to act with conviction and with compassion, as He did in Matthew 9:36. Compassion is so important. We're not talking about a cold, abrasive, belligerent, angry conviction. We're talking about a compassionate conviction that feels the heart of God.

So we're not just content to listen to God's Word—we want to feel His heart. Let's not just talk about the poor—let's feel Christ's heart for the poor. Let's not just talk about the unborn—let's feel God's heart for the child in the womb. Let's see the oppressed and the enslaved as He sees them. Let's think about those who are crushed by political or economic or ethnic oppression from His perspective. Let's love the orphan and the widow, the homosexual and the heterosexual, the immigrant, the immoral, as He loves them—even weeping over them (Luke 19).

Let's feel His heart, and then let's reflect His heart in a Romans 9 kind of way, or a Matthew 22 "*love your neighbor as yourself*" kind of way. What if it was your kids who were starving or dying, or your daughter being sold into sex slavery? Love your neighbor as yourself. It changes your perspective. Just think about it out there—as yourself.

Let's act with compassion and conviction, and let's act with courage. The cost of Christian conviction in contemporary culture is growing steeper every day. Which is doubtless why more and more

Christians are stepping away from the truth of God's Word. They fear the powerful force that's leading even more and more churches today to accommodation or acquiescence instead of action in the surrounding culture.

So let's pray with confidence, just like they did in Acts 4 as we read earlier. Let's proclaim the truth. One of my favorite quotes comes from Elizabeth Rundle Charles, who is commenting on Martin Luther's confrontation on key issues in his day:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proven, and to be steady on all the battle fronts besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Tonight we're diving into issues where the battle is raging, and followers of Christ do not have the option of flinching. The same gospel that compels us to combat poverty compels us to defend marriage. The same gospel that compels us to war against sex trafficking compels us to address sexual immorality in all of its forms. Christians who speak out on some things and stay silent on others miss the whole point of the gospel they claim to believe.

So let's pray with confidence, let's proclaim God's truth with compassion, and let's participate with God in pointing people to Christ in our culture. All the while, we must lean on His grace. This is so important. We're going to hit on some really sensitive issues tonight—from abortion to sexual immorality to marriage to divorce to orphans and widows. As I have studied and prepared for tonight, I have thought there's probably not a person involved in Secret Church who will not have a tender spot we're going to hit on somewhere.

For some, there may be a lot of tender spots. We're going to talk about marriage with a lot of husbands and wives who are struggling in marriage. We're going to talk about divorce, with spouses and children spread across the country and around the world who have pain from broken homes. We're going to talk about widows. You might be freshly experiencing the pain of losing a spouse. We're going to talk about homosexuality. Some people are confused—they want to honor God, but are wondering why they have these desires. We're going to talk about abortion to people who have had abortion in their past. I'm keenly aware there are personal landmines all over the place.

So let's start by saying together that we're going to lean on God's grace, knowing that none of us is perfect and the grace of God alone can cover over our imperfections—that all of us have hurts and God alone can bring healing to those hurts. As we listen to His Word, let's lean on His grace in each of our lives, so that we might live for His glory. In a 1 Corinthians 10:31 kind of way, we want to do all we do *"to the glory of God."* We want to be zealous about the glory of God. J.C. Ryle says that the one thing that drives us should be the glory.

In Acts 17, Paul walks into Athens, where he is surrounded by all these different gods. The story of what he does there just compels us—in the midst of idolatry—to long for God to be praised. Paul saw all these idols around him, and he was provoked to act because he wanted God to be exalted over all these false gods. You might say, “Well, we’re not in Athens with their idolatry.” But I want us to realize that idolatry is at the root of every single issue we’re talking about tonight.

Think about it. Why do we ignore the poor? Is it not because we idolize wealth and possessions and pleasures and luxuries and comfort in this world? Why do we abort babies? Why do we disregard orphans and widows? Is it not because of our idolization of convenience? Isn’t the debate over homosexuality and so-called same sex marriage ultimately about the idolization of sex—when we want it, how we want it, with whomever we want it?

Once we realize that idolatry is at the root of all these issues, we realize that the reason we address these issues is because we’re zealous for the glory of God. God is not being glorified. Wealth and comfort and convenience and sex—and ultimately self—we are being glorified instead of God being glorified. He’s the Lord—Isaiah 42:8—that’s His name, and He gives no glory to another. Henry Martyn, a missionary to India, the land of a million gods, once said, “I cannot endure existence if Jesus is not glorified; it is hell to me, if He is always dishonored.”

This is why we speak and act. It’s not because it’s easy, not because it’s popular, but because we want God to receive the glory He’s due. This is why Paul preached in Athens on that day that God is the Creator of the universe, the Sustainer of life, the Ruler of the nations, the Savior of the needy, the Father of each of us, the King over all of us and the Judge of the world. In the midst of idolatry, let’s long for God to be praised, and in the midst of immorality, let’s believe in the power of the gospel.

Acts 18:1-11 is an encouragement to us. Paul was in Corinth, a city filled with sexual immorality—which we’ll be talking about later—and he was discouraged even to the point of wanting to leave. Christ came to him and said, “No, you stay.” At the end of this passage, Jesus said to him:

“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” And he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

This was how the church in Corinth was founded.

May this be said of us in our culture: because of our confidence in the word of Christ, we are not afraid. We’re not afraid, and we know we’re not alone. So we will not be silent, and ultimately we will not be stopped. Which is exactly what happened with the gospel in Corinth: it advanced amidst a pagan culture. Not only that culture, but if you read the next part of Acts 18, you’ll see that the precedent was set for the spread of the gospel across cultures.

See this, church. We serve a great God Who is worthy of glory in our culture and among all cultures.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the people! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. (Psalm 96:3-6)

We serve a great God, and we share a glorious gospel. It's a gospel that may not be popular in our culture—or any culture, for that matter—but of which we need not be ashamed, knowing it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. This is the gospel we give our lives to proclaim. Why would we not? Think about the message we have to give to our culture and to the cultures of the world. Good news: there is hope for the hurting, for the weary and the burdened (Matthew 11:28-30), for the worried and the anxious (1 Peter 5:6-7).

We have good news—there's freedom for the enslaved. I want those girls that I saw in Nepal to know there's freedom in Christ. There's love for the lost and the wandering (Luke 19:10). There's beauty for the battered (Isaiah 61:1-3). God Himself will make you strong in your weakness (Psalm 46:1; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). He makes the unclean clean. No matter what you've done, He will remember your sins no more (Isaiah 43:25). He'll make you new.

The best news of all—He makes the dead live. That is great news for the world we live in. Into a world of poverty and slavery, the murder of babies and the neglect of children, oppression, persecution, suffering and death—Jesus has come. He has suffered for us. He has conquered sin and death to give us the hope of eternal life free from pain and hurt, trial and tribulation. And one day, God Himself is going to wipe every single tear from our eyes. We can't stay silent with that good news, can we? We can't just sit back and stay quiet, knowing this great God with this great gospel.

Consider Where We're Going

So here's the plan. Here's where we're going the rest of tonight. We're going to start with a quick overview of the gospel—which I'm convinced is the greatest offense in the culture around us—what the Bible says about Who God is, who we are, why Jesus is unique, what we must do and what's at stake in the gospel. With that foundation, we're going to dive into these issues in our culture and a call to action. This is the order we'll cover them in: abortion, orphans and widows, poverty, slavery, sexuality, ethnicity and immigration, and liberty and persecution—all that leading to what I've called the greatest injustice of all, landing in the end on the ultimate hope for all.

Hopefully we'll end there before the sun is coming up tomorrow. Just kidding. Kind of. Sound good? Okay, we're going to hit this next section, and then we'll take our first break after this next section.

I said we're going to hit it quickly—not because the gospel is not important. We're going to be coming back to it over and over again all night long. I just want to make sure we're on the same page from the beginning.

But at the same time, I know—when I think and when I've prayed about this number of people in one gathering—I know there are a variety of people, whether in this room or in many other different homes and churches that are represented in Secret Church, there are people who may not know and believe the gospel. Maybe you know you're not a Christian, and a Christian friend has invited you to be a part of this. I'm so glad you're here, and I'm hopeful and praying specifically that you might realize for the first time tonight how much God loves you. I pray that you'll hear His Word tonight and believe it for the first time, and it will totally change your heart.

And for others, I am confident there are church members in gatherings tonight who think they are Christians, but who may realize over the next few minutes that all your life you've been playing a game, and you've never really believed the gospel in a way that's gone past your head to penetrate your heart and change your life. I'm praying that even as this foundation is laid in the next few moments, God might open your mind and your heart in a fresh, altogether new way, to see what it means to know Him and to believe in Him and to follow Him.

The Gospel of Christ: The Greatest Offense

Here's why I call the gospel of Christ the greatest offense. It's obviously common today for Christians to be labeled “insulting” for their views on social issues. It's increasingly offensive to an ever-expanding number of people who say that a woman who has feelings for another woman should not express love for her in marriage. It doesn't take long for a Christian to be backed into a corner on that issue, not wanting to be offensive but wondering how to respond.

I want you to realize from the beginning: this is where the biblical view of homosexuality—which we'll talk about later—is nowhere near the greatest offense in Christianity. The gospel itself is a much, much, much greater offense. First Corinthians 1:18-25 tells us this. Here's a simple definition of the gospel that I want to unpack so we can think about how offensive it is.

The Gospel is the good news that the just and gracious Creator of the universe has looked upon hopelessly sinful men and women and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that everyone who turns from their sin and themselves and trusts in Jesus as Savior and Lord will be reconciled to God forever.

In that gospel statement, we see central claims about Who God is, who we are, why Jesus is unique amidst all the religious leaders of the world, why Christianity is unique among all the religions of the world, and as a result, what we must do in response to this good news, this gospel, and what is at stake in how we respond.

Who God Is

Let's start with Who God is. The offense of the gospel begins with the very first words of the Bible: *"In the beginning God."* That statement is mammoth, because from the very beginning the Bible asserts there is one God Who is the Creator of all. It says there is a God Who created every one of us, which means we belong to Him. We are sustained by Him. As self-sufficient as we may try to be, ultimately we do not sustain ourselves. Only God does that.

We belong to Him, we're sustained by Him and we're accountable to Him. You and I will answer to God. This God is the Creator of all, He's holy above all—which means He's perfect in every way. He's without equal, and He's without error. He's completely unlike us in His perfections and His purity, and as a part of His holiness, He's just. He will judge us with His perfect justice. So the beginning point, the stark reality of the gospel, is that there is a God Who will judge every single person in this gathering—in this room and every room represented tonight. There is a God Who will judge you, and He will be just.

Thankfully, this holy God is also good. He's good, and we can trust His goodness. *"The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made"* (Psalm 145:9). Not only is He good, this God is gracious. Which means the just God does not give us what justice deserves when we turn to and trust in Him.

Just sit back and think for a second about the offense already being created here. You tell any modern man or woman there is a God Who sustains, owns, defines, rules and one day will judge him or her, and that person will balk in offense. Any person would—and the reality is, every person has.

Who We Are

This leads to who we are. According to Genesis 1:26-28, we are created by God and formed by Him—Psalm 139, which we'll come back to in a minute on abortion—but we're also corrupted by sin. This is the human condition. We're beautiful since we were created by God, and yet broken because we've turned from God. John Stott sums it up really well:

We are able to think, choose, create, love and worship; but we are also able to hate, covet, fight and kill. Human beings are the inventors of hospitals for the care of the sick, of universities for the acquisition of wisdom, and of churches for the worship of God. But they have also invented torture chambers, concentration camps, and nuclear arsenals. This is the paradox of our humanness. We are both noble and ignoble, both rational and

irrational, both moral and immoral, both creative and destructive, both loving and selfish, both Godlike and bestial.

This is evident from the very beginning of the Bible. Genesis 2 contains a clear command from God: to eat from any tree except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's a story that many in the church are familiar with, but sometimes we fail to ask the question, "So what's wrong with knowing the difference between good and evil, and why couldn't you eat from that tree?" We've got to realize, this is not about mere information concerning good and evil. This is about the determination of good and evil.

In other words, for the man and woman to eat from this tree was to reject God as the One Who determines good and evil, and to assume that responsibility themselves. See what the temptation in the Garden was all about. It was the temptation to rebel against God's authority, and in the process it made humans the arbiters of morality—which is exactly what they did in Genesis 3. They doubted God's goodness, they questioned God's word, and they spurned His authority. Did you notice in Genesis 3 that it's the first time we ever see a question in the Bible, and it revolves around God's word? Satan says to the woman, "*Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?*"

That's where sin starts. It starts with questioning God's word. It's not just Adam and Eve—it's all of us. We all take commands from God, and we turn them into questions about God. After all, is God really holy? Does He really know what is right? Is God really good? Does He really know what is best for me? In questions like that, notice what's happening. Man and woman are subtly asserting themselves, not as the ones to be judged by God, but ones who sit in judgment of God, rejecting His authority as the determiner of good and evil.

In the process, they are relativizing all morality. When we realize this—this is so important—we realize that the moral relativism of the 21st century is nothing new. For example, the whole conversation about marriage today revolves around a rejection of how God has defined marriage, to say, "We know better than God does what is best for our family." And at the root of that claim is a conviction that morality changes with the times. There are no moral absolutes. Moral is what feels right or best to you at a certain time in a certain place.

Which is exactly what secular philosophy would have us believe. Just listen to Michael Ruse, a noted agnostic philosopher of science. He said, "The position of the modern evolutionist, therefore, is that...morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth.... Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, it is illusory." In other words, morality is illusory. It changes. So that which was common in the United States even 20 years ago is now totally questioned—because morality changes over time.

Similarly, the famous atheist Richard Dawkins wrote:

In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no other good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.

In other words, there are no objective moral foundations in the world. There's just DNA, a product of evolutionary development, and we dance to its music. That's exactly the worldview that is prevailing in American culture today. It's a worldview that says society determines right and wrong. Whatever culture deems right is right, and whatever culture deems wrong is wrong.

But just stop and think about the frightening implications of that worldview. Take an issue like sex trafficking. Are we really going to conclude that as long as society approves of that industry, it's no longer immoral? Are we willing to tell young girls sold into sex slavery that they and the men that take advantage of them are merely dancing to their DNA, that what's happened is not inherently evil, but they're just products of a blind, pitiless indifference that's left them unlucky in the world? Not one of us would say that to one of those girls. But that is the fruit of the secular worldview that currently dominates our culture.

I think about a conversation I had with a friend who is a self-identified pagan. He summed up his philosophy of life this way: "Doing no harm to others, be true to yourself." So my friend thought his supposedly simple philosophy was sufficient to make value judgments or moral decisions in life. The glaring problem behind that entire worldview, though, is: who defines harm? And to what extent should we be true to ourselves? After all, wouldn't a pimp in northern Nepal claim that he's creating a better life for a young girl whose chance of living was slim to begin with? Might he not also claim that she has a job he believes she enjoys? And what's to keep that pimp from arguing that he and this girl are helping scores of men be true to the sexual craving they have within themselves?

This is where the gospel is totally countercultural and offensive, because the gospel claims that being true to ourselves is not the answer. That's actually the problem. The gospel starts with the realization that we are centered on ourselves—centered on self—and this is the root of sin. The gospel claims that although we're created in God's image, we've all rebelled against Him in our independence. It looks different in every one of our lives, even in this room, but every one of us is like Adam and Eve in that Garden. We think even if God said not to do something, we're going to do it anyway. In essence, every time we sin we're saying, "God is not Lord over me. God doesn't know what is best for me. I define what's right and wrong, good and evil. Whatever seems or feels right to me is right for me."

And in the end for all of us, ultimately it's about me. Romans 5:12 makes it clear this is not just about Adam and Eve—it's about us. The Bible diagnoses our condition in Romans 3:10-12 by simply

saying we've all turned aside to ourselves. The essence of sin is the exaltation of self. God has designed us to put Him first in our lives, others second and ourselves last. Sin totally reverses the order. We put ourselves first, others next—many times, in an attempt to use them for ourselves—and God somewhere, if anywhere, in the distant background.

The fruit of this is all over our lives and our culture, because we've turned from God to ourselves. We're morally evil (Genesis 8:21), we're spiritually sick (Matthew 9:12), and we're slaves to sin (John 8:34), where Jesus says, *"Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."* We don't think of ourselves as slaves, but think about it. Take an alcoholic for example who gets drunk because he believes that's the path to personal satisfaction. In reality, he's enslaved to an addiction that's leading to his ruin. But it's not just the alcoholic.

Sin works the same way in all our lives. In small ways and big ways, we tell ourselves no matter what God says, that a lustful thought here, a harsh word there, a selfish action—that will satisfy us. We persuade ourselves that no matter what God says—the money we have, no matter how we get it, the sex we experience with whomever—we want it and we believe it will gratify us. We convince ourselves that no matter what God says, we're going to be pleased with this person or that possession, this pleasure or that pursuit. We chase all these things thinking we're free. But we're blind to our own bondage. We are all running to serve ourselves, yet we are actually rebelling against the only One Who can satisfy our souls.

We're slaves to sin and blind to truth, covering up our guilt by confusing our standards. We think, "Well, the Bible's outdated and impractical. Greed isn't wrong—it's necessary in the good of ambition. Promoting ourselves is the only way to be successful today. Lust is natural for contemporary men and women. Sex is expected, regardless of marriage or gender." In all our supposed seeing, we don't realize how blind we are. The Bible is clear: we're children of wrath, deserving the judgment of God, and that judgment is physical and spiritual death. We are spiritually dead. See how the gospel diagnoses the human condition in a very countercultural way.

Why Jesus Is Unique

But thankfully He does not leave us there. Enter Jesus, and now see why Jesus is unique. See why He's not just one of many good options among religious teachers to follow, why He is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him. What a statement in John 14:6! As if the gospel were not already offensive enough through the announcement of Who God is and who we are, now we hear that Jesus is the only Person in all of human history Who is able to reconcile us to God. No other path is sufficient. No other leader is supreme. If you want to know God—with seven billion people in the world—there's only one way: through Jesus.

Is that true? I mean, how can a Man in His right mind 2,000 years ago make that claim, and how can people in their right mind 2,000 years later believe it? It only makes sense if everything we see in the Bible is true. Think about it. We've seen that God is completely holy, infinitely good, perfectly just, and lovingly gracious. We've also seen that we're created by God, but also corrupted by sin. We've turned away from God and stand guilty in sin before Him.

Those twin realities set up the ultimate problem in the entire universe: how can a just God save rebellious sinners who are due His judgment? Look at Proverbs 17:15, which I mentioned earlier under God's justice. *"He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord."* Catch that. God detests those who call the guilty innocent and those who call the innocent guilty—because He's just. He's a good Judge. He calls the guilty, guilty, and the innocent, innocent.

So when God comes to you and me as a good Judge, what will He say to us? The answer inevitably is "guilty." If He were to say "innocent," He would be an abomination to Himself. That's the problem. Every man and woman is guilty before God. So then, how can God express His justice without condemning every sinner in the world? In other words, how can God love us when His justice requires condemning us? It's the fundamental problem in the entire universe.

Now to be sure, it's not the problem most people identify. Most people in our culture are not losing sleep how it's possible for God to be just and loving toward sinners at the same time. Instead, most people are accusing God, saying, "How can You punish sinners? How can you let good people go to hell?" The question the Bible asks is exactly the opposite. "God, how can You be just and let guilty sinners into heaven?"

The only solution to that problem is Jesus Christ. *"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 2:5). And here is what is utterly unique about Him: His life displayed the righteousness of God. Every detail of His identity is very important. He's fully man—human like us—and fully God—divine like God. In both His humanity and deity He is without sin. He never rebelled against God, which means He as a human was innocent before God. He had no price to pay for sin and did not deserve death.

Yet, He died—which begs the question: why? I'm glad you asked. His death satisfied the justice of God. He died for you and me, in our place. He had no sin for which He deserved death, but He chose to take our place, enduring the judgment we deserve in our stead. That's what the cross of Christ is all about. At the cross God expressed His judgment upon sin. He poured out all His divine judgment due sin, death, upon man. At the same time, on the cross God endured His judgment against sin. Jesus—fully human and fully divine—endured the judgment due sin, and in this way at that cross God enabled salvation for

sinner. He died for you and me, for our sake. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The gospel—the good news—doesn’t end there. After being dead for three days, Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus’ life displayed the righteousness of God, His death satisfied the justice of God, and His resurrection demonstrated the power of God over sin and death. What other leader, what other person in all of history, has defeated sin and conquered death? No one. I mean, we’re talking about dead for three days and coming back alive. We’re not talking about resuscitation. We’re not talking about going to heaven and coming back and writing a best-selling book about it. It’s like going to a funeral tomorrow where you see a body in a casket and put in the ground and dirt put over it, and you walk away, and then next weekend that guy comes up to you on the street and says, “Hello.” This is unusual—and it’s the greatest news in the entire world: death has been defeated.

What We Must Do

So what must we do in response to this? This is the exact question that was asked in Acts 2:37. The answer was, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

Here’s what the gospel compels us to do: we must repent. We must turn from our sin and ourselves—that’s what repent means—to acknowledge that we’ve rebelled against God. We must turn from sin and from centering on ourselves. That’s why Jesus summarizes His call to His potential disciples in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* You must die to a sinful, self-centered way of living. It’s what it means to follow Christ: turning from your sin and yourself.

We must repent, and we must believe. We must trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (Acts 16:31). Romans 10:9, *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* from all your sin, from death, for eternal life.

What Is At Stake

This is what’s at stake. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). See it—eternity is at stake in how you or I respond to this gospel. Heaven is a glorious reality for all who trust in Christ. Heaven—a place we’re going to talk about as we close tonight—is a place of full reconciliation to and complete restoration

with God, where sin and suffering and pain and sorrow will finally be no more. Men and women who have trusted in Christ will live in perfect harmony with God and each other.

But that is not the only option. Hell is a dreadful reality for all those who die without Christ. Hell—a place about which Jesus spoke often. Revelation 20:15, *“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Tim Keller observed, “If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth.” And it is. It’s a crucial truth that flows from everything we’ve seen to this point.

Think about it. Hell is a place of ultimate justice, a place of fiery agony. This is how Jesus described hell. This is not some character of a preacher sweating and yelling about fire and brimstone. This is Jesus, the “Lord of Love and Author of Grace,” talking about unquenchable fire in Mark 9:43. It’s a place of conscious torment according to Jesus in Luke 16:22-28, a place of outer darkness, and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. It’s a place of continual rebellion, where all who didn’t repent and died in rebellion against God will continue in rebellion against the One they now know is Lord. It’s a place of vile association and divine destruction (2 Peter 3:7), and complete separation from God and His goodness (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

And ultimately hell is a place of eternal duration. It’s a place where agony will last forever and ever (Revelation 14:11), with no rest day or night. Jonathan Edwards gave this famous description of hell:

When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all; you will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions and millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then you will have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains.

It’s real. It’s not a fairy tale or a game—this is real. To say things like, “We had a hell of a time,” or “They played a hell of a game,” or “It was a hell of a song”—we have no idea what we’re saying. The stakes go far beyond the culture you and I live in right now.

And so the gospel demands a decision from me and from you. The options are simple but eternally significant. One, will you turn from Jesus? Will you turn from Him and continue to live for yourself? Will you choose to live without Christ now, and as a result to die without Him forever? Or will you turn to Jesus? Will you choose to die with Christ now—to die to yourself, to repent of your sin, and in so doing to live with Christ forever?

See what’s at stake? In a day when hell seems very countercultural, outdated, unreal, hardly even talked about in so many churches, hear the words of A.W. Tozer:

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unheeded.

So I'm pleading for you not to let the command to repent go unheeded in your life. And then once you repent, then for all who turn from your sin or have turned from your sin and yourself and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord—I'm pleading for you not to stay silent with this truth. I mean, how can we stay silent, Christian, with this gospel? Yes, it may be costly in our culture. Yes, it will not be popular to call people to believe in Christ because heaven and hell are at stake. But surely their salvation is more important than your popularity. Surely it's worth potential offense to see a friend or family member or acquaintance saved from their sins forever. In the words of A.W. Pink:

What is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths which are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the character of God—His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging veracity. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the condition of the natural man—his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate hostility to God, the fact that he is 'condemned already' and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurable-ness of it, the endlessness of it.

Coupled with that, the greatest news in the entire world is that sin and death have been defeated, and you can have eternal life with this God. It's not based on anything you bring to the table, but based on what Christ—the one and only—has done on your behalf. This is the greatest news in the entire world, so believe it. I urge you to believe it and proclaim it—no matter what it costs in the culture in which you live.

Will you pray with me before we go any further tonight? As you bow your heads, let me just ask you: have you believed this gospel? Have you repented? I'm not asking if you've gone to church or been involved in church all your life, but have you turned from your sin and yourself and trusted in Jesus as the only Savior and the sovereign Lord over your life? There's no more important question to answer than that question.

If you have not, if you're thinking, "I don't know," I invite you even right now to say in your heart, "I receive this good news." Just say to God, "I turn from my sin and myself and I put my trust in You—what You've done for me, Jesus. I confess that You are Lord. I'm turning from myself to trust in

You.” I pray that in this holy moment God might save hundreds or even thousands of people from their sin.

And then, O God, I’m compelled to pray on behalf of all who have a warm assurance in their heart as that question is asked, because we know we’re safe. You’ve saved us. We’re not perfect, but You have covered over all our imperfections, and You’ve given us the hope of eternal life with You. So I pray, O God, that in my heart and in the hearts of thousands of others who have that assurance that You would give us a holy unrest with keeping this gospel to ourselves. God, forgive us for our silence. Forgive us for a lack of urgency in proclaiming this message in whatever culture You put us in. We pray from the start tonight that You would give us boldness in the days to come to proclaim this gospel to the culture You have put us in, that You would remove fear, give us conviction, courage and compassion, driven by compassion from You to make this good news known to people around us. God, I pray that over the next week, even tomorrow morning, people would come to Christ as a result of us speaking this gospel to them because of what You’re doing in our hearts right now. I pray it would be so in this culture and 100 different countries around the world. And we continue to pray it would happen in Vietnam. God, as this gospel is proclaimed may it prove to be the power that You’ve given for salvation to those who believe. May it be so, I pray, in Jesus name. Amen.

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