

Lifeblood: The One Thing You Can't Live Without

The Gospel: Why It's Important

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The Gospel: Why It's Important Matthew 7:13-27

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is the final "Amen." He is the bread of life. He is the chief cornerstone, Christ our Creator. He is our deliverer. He is our Everlasting Father. He is God. He is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Great High Priest, the Holy One, and the hope of glory. He is the great I AM. He is the image of the invisible God, the Judge of the living and the dead. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is majestic and mighty and no one compares to Him. He is the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He is the power of God. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the supreme sacrifice, the way, the truth and the life, the very Word of God made flesh.

Jesus is all of these things, and we have reduced Him to a poor, puny Savior who is just begging for you to accept Him. As if Jesus needed to be accepted by you. Jesus doesn't need your acceptance. He is infinitely worthy of all glory in all the universe. At this moment, there are multitudes of creatures surrounding Him, one of whom whose beauty, if it was in this room, would startle us all, and they are all doing His bidding and singing His praises. He does not need your songs. He doesn't need your prayers, your church attendance or your Bible study. He doesn't need you at all. You need Him! You're desperately in need of Him. You need Him for every breath you breathe. Every person in this room, the only reason you're heart is beating at this moment is because Jesus, Himself, is giving it rhythm. Where did we get the idea that Jesus needed us to accept Him?

Ladies and gentlemen, we are going to begin a series that I believe is eternally important. I am convinced that multitudes of professing Christians have been sold a lie when it comes to their eternal destinies. In our contemporary efforts to spread the gospel to as many people as possible, I believe we have so maligned and manipulated and misrepresented the very gospel we have wished to spread. We have formulated the gospel as a "plan" of salvation and forgotten the gospel as the power of God for salvation. We have paired it down to a minimalist picture, the smallest picture, and it gets smaller and smaller and smaller, into a shrink-wrapped presentation that, if one delivers it, and gets someone to say the right things back to them and even pray the right things back to them, then we pronounce them "saved" and we move on.

Multitudes of professing Christians have been told that as long as they prayed that prayer or walked down the aisle and talked to that person or signed that card that their salvation is complete. The result is a host of professing Christians, including many people in this room, think they are eternally saved from their sins when the reality is, they are not. The reason is because we've taken the gospel, the very lifeblood, out of Christianity, and we've put Kool-Aid in its place.

The reason we're going to dive into this series, Lifeblood, is because what haunts me as a pastor, what keeps me awake many nights is the thought, the idea that sitting in front of me, Sunday after Sunday...not just sitting in front of me, but I, myself, could one day stand

before Jesus and have Him look at me or multitudes of you and say, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers."

Do you think Jesus could say that to you? Look with me, if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, to Matthew 7. This is Jesus speaking to His disciples. This is one of those instances in the Gospel where the disciples, here, are not just that inner group of twelve but the larger crowds, many of them casual listeners, some of them even convinced listeners starting to buy in to what Jesus is talking about, and they're listening to Him speak this infamous sermon, this Sermon on the Mount, that begins in Matthew 5. We come to the end of it, the climactic conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is speaking to His disciples. Listen to what He says to them. Matthew 7:13,

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

This is how Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount, with a picture of a house, symbolizing one's life, falling with a great crash. I think you would struggle to find in Scripture a more horrifying picture than what we see here, especially in verses 21 through 23. This idea that there will be people...not just people...many people, many people who will stand before Jesus and cry out, "Lord, Lord, did we not do these things..." and He will look at them and Jesus, Himself, will turn them away from heaven saying, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

What Jesus is telling us here in Matthew 7 is that it is possible to deceive ourselves in the most important issue in this life. It is possible to deceive ourselves in the one issue that determines all of our eternity. Jesus is saying that He stands at the crux of eternity, and He divides eternity. On one side, there's a broad road that leads to destruction and death and the other side, a narrow road that leads to life. He uses these pictures: One side there's a bad tree and another side a good tree; true faith, false faith; foundation on a rock, foundation on sand. He's talking here about people who are spiritually deceived into

thinking...He's not speaking in Matthew 7 to atheists and agnostics, pagans and heretics. He's not speaking to the irreligious; He is speaking to the devoutly religious people of His day who were deluded into thinking that they were on a road that leads to life, when the reality is, most of them are on a road that leads to death.

Do you think it's possible for you to be deceived in the most important issue in life? You've seen polls before that have talked about how perhaps fifty percent of Americans claim to be "born again Christians." Those same polls usually go on to talk about how the lifestyles of born again Christians are virtually indistinguishable from the lifestyles of those who are not born again Christians, and many people have interpreted that to say, "Well, the church is no different from the world." I don't think that's a proper interpretation. I think a more accurate interpretation would be to say that these people who claim to be born again Christians and their lives are virtually indistinguishable from everyone else in the world are not born again Christians. They think they are Christians but they're not. Do you think it's possible to think you're a Christian and not be a Christian?

That's exactly what Jesus is talking about here. We've got to realize that at the core of who we are, our sinful nature, we reject the gospel. Every single one of us, myself included, at the core of who we are. 2 Corinthians 4 says Satan, the devil himself, is blinding the minds of unbelievers, and I'm convinced that one of the ways he is blinding the minds of unbelievers is by convincing them that they are believers. I think he's doing this all across Birmingham, Alabama. There's a word here for all of us.

The Danger of Spiritual Deception...

The worst thing that anyone could walk away saying or even thinking for a second is, "They really needed to hear that. I'm glad he preached on that to them." It misses the entire point. There's a word here for every single person here. We all face the danger of spiritual deception. Could it be that one day Jesus will look at you and say, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoer!?" Could it be that He could look at me and say that? Absolutely, He could. The reality is for many people, He will. Then, if that's the case, then I don't think there is anything more important than us spending time looking at the depths of what the gospel means and what salvation means, understanding it as truly as possible and avoiding the danger of spiritual deception.

So, what I want to do is I want to slowly, intentionally, very deliberately unpack these three pictures: Roads and trees and foundations. I want us to see what Jesus is telling us about the danger of spiritual deception. We'll start with this first picture in verses 13 and 14. *"Enter through the narrow gate,"* He says, *"For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

We gravitate toward that which is easy and popular.

Warning number one from Jesus...the danger of spiritual deception: We gravitate towards that which is easy and popular. Again, we gravitate towards that which is easy and popular. The wide gate, the broad road, is the easy road. It's inviting; it's spacious; it accommodates the crowds; it's attractive, it's inclusive to whoever wants to come. There are few rules, few regulations, few requirements involved on the broad road.

Now, don't miss this: It's a religious road. The context here is that Jesus is speaking to a religious people. Don't be fooled; this is a religious road that doesn't require much of you. It

involves grandiose promises at very little cost to you. Contemporary picture...the broad road...all that's required to go on this road is a one-time decision for Jesus. A one-time decision to pray to Jesus, and after that, you don't need to worry about the commands of Jesus, and you don't need to worry about the glory of Jesus anymore. You have a pass to get you to heaven, and your sin will be tolerated along the way.

Lest you think that's an exaggeration, that's exactly the kind of gospel that has been sold to many people in our culture today...in our, supposedly, "Christian" culture. Jesus says, "Many will go on that road," and then, He says, "*Enter through the narrow gate...small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.*" What's really interesting is that He uses two different words for narrow here in the original language of the New Testament. The first time you see it there in verse 13, "Enter through the narrow gate...", the word, literally, means, "to groan as if you're under pressure; to be pressed on all sides." Narrow gate.

It's not easy to go through the narrow gate. The second time He uses it, "...small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life...", the word that's used there is the verb form of the noun that is used all throughout the New Testament to talk about tribulation, most often persecution. What Jesus is saying when He talks about the narrow gate, the narrow road that leads to life, is He's saying that the way of Christ is hard to follow. We gravitate toward that which is easy and popular, but the way of Christ is hard to follow.

Jesus had already set the stage for this. Go back to Matthew 5. Look back at Matthew 5...what He said earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at verse 10. Remember, this is the Beatitudes. This is when Jesus is pronouncing blessing on people, and I want you to listen to who is blessed. Who is blessed in the kingdom of God? Listen to Matthew 5:10. "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Who belongs to the kingdom of heaven? Those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Verse 11, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad...*" This is a weird way to start a sermon. You're going to be persecuted and rejoice in it "*because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" "You follow me, you'll be persecuted. You'll experience trial and it won't be easy. That's why only a few of you will actually find this road." This goes completely against what you would expect. It's narrow; it's hard.

Not only is the way of Christ hard to follow, but second, the way of Christ is hated by many. It's hated by many. "What do you mean, 'hated by many'?" This is why it's so narrow. This is why it's hard to find. Go to Matthew 10. Listen to what Jesus says there. Matthew 10:17-39. Jesus is speaking to His disciples here, talking about what this road involves, and these are verses that we probably don't have underlined in our Bibles.

You turn over to Matthew 11:28-30: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" You'll underline that. Put it in pink or something. Put stars around it. Yes, this is good. Do you have Matthew 10:17 underlined in your Bible? Listen to what Jesus said there: "*Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.*" Star that. "*On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you...*" Not "if" they arrest you, "*But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.*"

Get down to verse 21. Listen to what Jesus is saying to His disciples. *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."* Verse 22: *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."* Get down to verse 37. He's talking about these family relationships. He says, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

"You want to follow me?" Jesus says. "You want to obey me? You want to make disciples of all nations? You will lose your lives! You want to be on the road that leads to life, you die! You die to yourself and you pick up the cross; it's an instrument of torture and execution and you bear it. All men will hate you because of me." What a picture. This is not the way we picture following Jesus.

That's exactly what Jesus pictured. Luke 9:57-62. Remember? Three men come up to Jesus, all eager to follow Him, back to back to back. The first man says, "I'll follow you wherever you go." They're very eager. I'll tell you what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, "Well come on. The more the merrier." He doesn't say, "This is going to up our numbers. Yes, by all means." Instead, He looks back at this guy, and He says, "If you follow me, you lose the roof over your head." The second guy, eager to follow Him. The only problem is that his dad has just died. He just wants to go bury his father. Jesus says, "You don't have time for that. Instead, let the dead bury their own dead. You come and follow me."

The last guy, eager...just wants to go back and say goodbye to his family, and Jesus says, "There's no time for that. Set your face towards me, and you don't turn back. You don't even go and say goodbye to your mom or dad." Sounds cold, doesn't it? Brash, even harsh. You think, "Well, I love my mother or father. I love my son or daughter, my husband or wife. I don't understand this." The reality is Matthew 13 says that when you find Jesus and the treasure that Jesus is, it is at that point that you realize that there is absolutely nothing in this world that you will not sell, that you will not be rid of in order to have Him because He is infinitely worthy.

This is a hard way; a very hard way. It's not for those who want a cheap pass to heaven while they go on living according to the worldly desires that are in them. That road leads to destruction, *"apoleia,"* in the New Testament...definitive destruction, not just extinction, but the hopeless eternity of death. That's where that road leads. You've got a narrow road over here that only a few can find, and it leads...this lonely, costly road leads to life. We know so little of the narrow road with Jesus. He says it's the road that leads to life there.

Some of you are thinking, "Aren't you being a little extreme? Have you lost it? Maybe two years ago we should have made that transition somewhere else. This is a little too extreme. I thought that coming to faith in Christ is as simple as a child coming to faith. Childlike faith. It's simple; you're complicating it." Yes, it is simple as a child. It's as a child running to a father, jumping in his arms and being embraced by him and him alone and saying to him, "I want nothing but you. Nothing but you." That is faith! That is the road that leads to life, but we shy away from that road. We have a much easier, much more popular road here to take that doesn't require this of us.

Sometimes people say that if we started to really live more like Christ then the world around us would be drawn to us. That's not what Jesus is saying here. If we really started to

live like Christ, the world would hate us. The world would crucify us is what Jesus says. Which road are you on? At this moment, are you on the broad road? Or are you on the narrow road? Are you following the way of Christ that is hard and hated by many? The danger of spiritual deception is that we gravitate toward that which is easy and popular.

We can profess publicly what we do not possess personally.

The second warning from Jesus: We can profess publicly what we do not possess personally. He says, "We can profess publicly what we do not possess personally." This is verses 15 through 23 back in Matthew 7 where Jesus addresses false prophets, false professors of faith. He says, "*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing...*" i.e., they look like they know Christ, they look like they have Christ, and they even speak to Christ like they know Him.

That's the picture in verses 21 through 23. You hear this, "Lord, Lord." This is an amazing picture. There is fervor here. "Lord, Lord!" They're crying out to Jesus. "Lord, Lord!" Not just fervor but orthodoxy. They're acknowledging the lordship of Jesus. "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy and drive out demons and perform miracles..." I mean, really, how can you do those things if you don't know Christ?

Don't be misled. All throughout Scripture, we see God using those who are opposed to Him to accomplish His will. All throughout Scripture, we see Satan at work in deceptive ways. You think about it. God...Old Testament picture...He's using Balaam...not just Balaam; He uses Balaam's donkey. This is no saved donkey. This is a donkey that God uses. It's Caiaphas in John 11 who prophesies. It's the sons of Sceva in Acts 19; they're driving out demons. It's Matthew 24; it's false prophets and false christs who are performing signs and wonders. All of these extravagant things only deceiving the reality that they are professing publicly what they do not possess personally. Jesus looks at those who are crying out "Lord, Lord, did we not do these things in your name." He quotes Psalm 6 to them and says, "*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.*"

So, how do we know if what we profess publicly, even here, what we're singing...how do we know if what we're professing publicly is something, someone, we possess personally? How do you know that? Jesus says two things. He says, number one, the way of Christ is always fruitful. The way of Christ is always fruitful. "*By their fruit you will recognize them,*" He says in verse 16. "A good tree bears good fruit. A bad tree bears bad fruit. Not by their gifts, not by these extravagant things you see. By their fruit, you will recognize them." If someone is following Christ, they bear the righteousness of Christ. If someone is following Christ, someone knows Christ, then they bear the love of Christ. If someone knows Christ, they bear the fruit of Christ. Christ always bears fruit. Always.

What this means is, if you don't see the righteousness of Christ, then Christ is not there. If you don't see the love of Christ, then Christ is not there. If you don't see, hear the truth of Christ, then Christ is not there. Christ always bears fruit. The way of Christ is always fruitful. James 2:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is [What?] dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

The way of Christ is always fruitful, and second, the way of Christ is always faithful. Always faithful. Listen to what Jesus said to these false professors in verse 21: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he..."* Clue in; this is who is going to enter. *"...only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Did you hear that? The one who enters the kingdom of heaven is he who does the will of the Father. The determining factor, entrance into the kingdom is obedience to the Father's will. This factor separates those who cry out "Lord, Lord" and those who enter into the kingdom. Those who enter into the kingdom do the Father's will. "Dave, are you saying that our works and our obedience are part of our salvation?" No, I'm not saying that; Jesus is.

Now, I want to be very, very, very careful here because it's at this point that we can begin to twist the gospel into something that it is not. We're not going to dive in-depth, tonight, into a picture of obedience, works in relation to salvation. However, hold on to this phrase: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Jesus says, "My way is always fruitful, and it's always faithful." Ladies and gentlemen, if there is not fruitfulness or faithfulness springing from your relationship with Christ, then that relationship with Christ may not exist altogether. This haunts me as a pastor; this frightens me as a pastor. It brings me to my knees to think that we can profess publicly what we do not possess personally.

We assume salvation without biblical foundation.

The third warning from Jesus: We assume salvation without biblical foundation. We assume salvation without biblical foundation. These are the last two illustrations. It's the picture of these builders, and the builders have some things in common. Both of the builders hear the words of Christ. Both of the builders construct homes that, it's implied here, are similar to each other, similar circumstances. From the outside, they probably even looked the same. They face the same storm, but the difference is in the foundation. The foundation makes all the difference in this illustration. One built on rock; one built on shifting, unstable sand.

The picture is, these houses are our lives. Jesus is putting before the people...He's speaking to this question: "Is your life built on a rock or is it built on sand?" Coming back to the danger of spiritual deception, no one builds a house knowing that it is going to collapse. No one plans to build a house so that it will collapse. Jesus is speaking to people who have built their house on sand, built their life on sand, but they don't realize it. They've unknowingly built their house on sand.

Jesus says, "How do you know when your life, house is built on a rock and when it's built on sand?" Two factors summed up in verse 24 and repeated in a different way in verse 26. He says, *"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* Two things. Number one: He's saying, "The way of Christ is dependent on hearing my Word". Receiving my Word is the foundation for your house, for your life."

Don't miss it: Jesus is not saying that the people who build their houses on sand don't have a foundation. They have a foundation; it's just a bad foundation. He's not telling the religious folk in Matthew 7 that they don't have a foundation for their life. They have a foundation, but instead of being built on the Word of Christ, it's built on external standards and opinions, thoughts, rules and regulations that they have constructed, they have packaged together to say, "If you do these things, your life will be valued by God. You will bring honor to God. If you do these things, you will be okay with God." Certainly, there are threads of the Word all throughout there, but it's heaped on by man's traditions and opinions and thoughts and practices. He says, "This is an unstable foundation; it's like sand."

I want to pause there for just a moment and ask you a question. Do you think it is possible in 20th century, 21st century Christianity that we have taken threads of the Word here or there, pieced them together with our thoughts and our traditions and our external standards and our ideas about what makes us okay with God, put it all together and said, "If you do these things, you'll be all right."? I think it's entirely possible to do that. I think it's entirely possible that we have done that.

You listen to how salvation, how the gospel is sold today. "Accept Jesus into your heart. Invite Christ into your life. Make Jesus Lord." None of these are biblical phrases...none of them. This should throw up red flags that we're using phrases that are not even displayed in Scripture. Shouldn't it? You will struggle in this book to find any place where anyone says, "Bow your heads, close your eyes and pray this prayer with me." You won't find it. We have taken the gospel and substituted language and thoughts and practices that are not displayed in Scripture.

The reality is the gospel confronts us face to face with the law of God, confronts us with the lordship of Christ, confronts each and every one of us with the depth of our sinfulness before God, the necessity of Christ's death on a cross to take the wrath of God upon Himself, the necessity of His resurrection to provide victory over sin and death and the grave. The gospel confronts us with the demand to repent, the enabling to repent...to turn from sin and to turn to Christ. Now, these are biblical terms.

These are biblical terms, but modern day evangelism has cast them aside and has built an evangelism on sinking sand that is disillusioning millions of souls. Biblical evangelism involves wrestling with the depth of the sinfulness of our soul and crying out to God, because we realize we have absolutely nowhere else to turn. Biblical evangelism sees Jesus, not as someone who is looking for an invitation, but Jesus is the one who is infinitely worthy of all glory, and demands immediate, total obedience; immediate and total surrender. Biblical evangelism knows nothing of praying a prayer and then going on and living your life like nothing has happened. Biblical evangelism demands radical obedience to Christ. Again, we will get to the obedience part later.

The picture is, we have assumed biblical salvation without biblical foundation, haven't we? Do you see how serious this is? Do you hear what Jesus is saying? There's a road that leads to destruction. Every tree that doesn't bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I'll tell them I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers. That house fell with a great crash." This has eternal ramifications here. We need to make sure we don't assume salvation without biblical foundation. Hear His words. Hear His words very clearly in Scripture.

Biblical salvation, the way of Christ is dependent on the Word of Christ, and not just dependent on His Word, but second, is obedient to His Word. We've already talked about this with verse 21. We've kept putting it off and we're going to keep putting it off. Just hold on to this in your minds that Jesus says, "*Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice...*" This is what differentiates the guy with the rock house and the guy with the sand house. They both heard the Word. The guy with the sand house did not put them into practice. He did not obey them.

Jesus is saying,

You live your life, you build your house on the righteousness of Christ and the Word of Christ and obedience to the Word of Christ, and when the storm of God's judgment comes, you will be standing because of the power of Christ,

your rock. The power of His words and the foundation...His righteousness in your life. If you build your house on the words of man, even the words of the Christian culture you live in, you build your house on these things and do not hear my Word and put them into practice, then you have built your house on sand and when the storm of God's judgment comes, it will fall. Your life will fall eternally in a great crash.

This is huge. This is gospel from the life, from the mouth of Jesus, and it is good news. It is good news to all who stand on the rock. It is damning news to all who have built their lives on sand. Have you assumed salvation without biblical foundation?

My goal is not to confuse. My goal, tonight, is not to scare or frighten. My goal is to invite us, to urge us, to plead with us and this community to seriously consider the biblical ramifications of the gospel. I can't think of anything else more important to consider. What I want to do is to begin to lead us one step down the path to spiritual authenticity. I'll go ahead and let you know that the goal is not to bring total resolution. The end of our time together will not involve, "Okay, now we bow our heads and close our eyes and pray and that way you can make sure you're okay before you get to eat." That's not the goal. This is the quick fix that involves the broad road that leads to destruction.

The Path to Spiritual Authenticity...

The goal is to set the stage for why knowing the gospel is important. To begin to take us down a road that leads to spiritual authenticity. I want to lead us down the path to spiritual authenticity. I want you to think about basically three tracks, so to speak, on this road that I want us to begin going down tonight, and it involves these three tracks.

Listen to your Savior.

Number one, in the days ahead, here's what I want to invite you to do, plead with you to do, urge you to do. Number one: Listen to your Savior. Listen to the Word of Christ and Scripture. Here's what I want to challenge us to do from the very beginning. I want to challenge us, in the days ahead, to test our traditions and our thoughts and our ideas with the words of Christ. I'm not saying in any way that we've missed everything, and we're completely wrong, and we need to throw everything in our faith out the window. I'm not saying that. However, I am saying that we need to be very, very careful that we don't do what Jesus warned against in Matthew 15:6, when He said, "You nullify the Word of God for the sake of your traditions." We've got to be careful here.

This is the danger of spiritual deception. We can heap on our traditions and think we're okay because we've covered up the reality that is underneath. So, I want to invite you to listen to the words of Christ and to study the words of Christ on your own. So, you're thinking, "I don't know what he's talking about: obedience and salvation." Well, go study and find out what the Bible says about obedience and salvation. Get into the words of Christ and hear what Christ says. Listen to your Savior and let's let Christ, by His Spirit, open our eyes to the truth of what He is saying.

Examine yourselves.

Second, examine yourselves. Examine yourselves. I know that some of you are thinking that this is a little too "out there" for you, and this is kind of dangerous even. It's dangerous to ask questions like this. It's dangerous to question where you are in your faith. Heed the words of 2 Corinthians 13:5. The Bible says to "*examine yourselves to see whether you are*

in the faith." Examine yourselves. The Bible says, "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you, unless, of course, you fail the test?" Isn't that a great verse? It reminds us, "Here's why this is a good path to go down. Here's why this is good to go down, because if we truly know Christ, if we are sitting in here, and we truly know Christ, then in the weeks to come, we will realize more and more and more the beauty of who Christ is in us. We will realize more and more the beauty of the gospel that has saved us from our sins." The gospel that is the foundation for every facet of our lives. The gospel, I pray, will come alive in new ways to us. That's a good thing.

Then, on the other hand, for those of us who are sitting in here who do not truly know Christ, who are spiritually deceived into thinking you're on one road when the reality is, you're on another road, it will be a very good thing that we've gone through this study. A very good thing. An eternally good thing.

Pray for your souls.

So, examine yourselves. We all, every single one of us, including myself, we need to examine ourselves in the days to come. Listen to your Savior, examine yourselves, and third, pray for your souls. Pray for your souls. Pray, pray, fast and pray for your souls. Here's why. When I talk about praying a superstitious prayer, praying a prayer and thinking you're saved, I'm not against prayer. I don't think it's bad to pray, and I don't even think prayer is necessarily disconnected from salvation; I think prayer is part of salvation. I think Scripture definitely teaches, as we'll see in the days to come, that salvation is a crying out for God to save you from your sin. There is no question that there is prayer involved in that.

So, I'm not saying that if you prayed a prayer, then you missed the point. That's not what I'm saying. So, please don't hear that. What I'm saying is that we have so minimized prayer to be a rote action we take that checks off a box to get us where we need to go spiritually and that misses the entire point of our salvation and our relationship with Christ, a true relationship with Christ. This is why I want to urge you to pray for your souls, to pray for the souls of those around you, to pray for each other, to pray for each of our lives, to cry out to God for each of our lives.

Here's the beauty: When you look in church history, and you see times when God and His Spirit has moved in mighty, unfathomable ways, it is not been because the church discovered some new truth they never heard before. God has poured out His Spirit in unusual, unfathomable ways when the church has rediscovered the truth that had always been there, and they had missed it. They had grown so cold toward it; they had grown so hard toward it. They'd grown so accustomed to caking over it with their cultural traditions that they had missed the beauty of it. Their eyes are opened and their hearts begin to melt in entirely new ways.

Don't we want this? Don't we want God and His Spirit to awaken our souls to see the beauty of what it means to be in Christ and be found in Christ, having His life in us. We want to see this? So, let's pray toward that end. Let's plead for Him to show us who we are in Christ, to show us where we are in Christ, whether or not we are in Christ, and what it means to be in Christ. Let's call out to God for Him to do that.

Even when you hear that, you are thinking, "I don't really have a desire to do that. In the days to come, I'm not going to cry out to God for my soul or the souls of those around me." If that is the case, then let me warn you that you may be exhibiting a picture of spiritual deception. If there is no desire in you for Christ, to know Christ deeper and more fully and for the people around you to know Christ more deeper and more fully, then there is a question about whether or not Christ has really changed your heart and taken root in you.

So, I invite you to pray for your souls, and let's pray that God will guard us from spiritual deception.

The intention is not to bring closure to this picture but to set us on a journey, and I want to invite you, where you are, to pray for your souls, to pray for the souls of those around you, to begin to examine yourselves and to listen to Christ. You can do that where you are or if you'd like, you can move somewhere else and kneel before God. However, I want us to take a few moments to pray and plead for God to do a work among us that awakens hearts, that awakens souls and eyes to His glory in the gospel and radically changes our lives and guards us from getting to a day where we stand before Him with high and hopeful expectations only to find our spiritual condition truly revealed and being cast away from His presence.

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