



## **THE GOSPEL AND NEPAL**

### **Luke 9-16**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Luke 9. Luke chapter nine. One of the great challenges of going overseas is coming back and trying to communicate what you've seen to people who haven't seen it; to try to communicate what you've smelled to people who haven't smelled it; trying to communicate what you felt to people who haven't felt it—through no fault of their own, obviously. They just weren't there for this particular journey, in this place, in this time. But it's a challenge to communicate what God has done in your heart to people who've not walked that journey, in that place, at that time. And this is my challenge this morning.

I got back Friday night from two weeks in Nepal, and God has done a deep work in my heart and my life; a work that I know has potentially huge ramifications for my life and for my family and for this church. And so I knew coming back that I needed to take time this morning to just share from the overflow of that, but I've really struggled, even in the earlier worship gathering, how best to do that. So I want to pray in a minute and then what I want to do is take these chapters that we've read over the last week in particular—Luke 9 through 16—I don't think it's a coincidence that we've been in these chapters during this week. But what I want to do is I want to show you, share with you, how these texts have come to light and some of the things that I have experienced; some of the things I've seen in the last couple of weeks that leads me to ask three questions in my life, and I want to put these questions before us as a church. So you'll notice in your worship guide there's not fill-in-the-blank kind of stuff. Just a blank sheet. So you might right down these questions or anything else that sticks out to you that the Lord might speak to you through His Word. I know that in this room there are some who are here who are not followers of Christ; and I'm going to be speaking mainly to Christians, to those who are followers of Christ. But if you're not a follower of Christ, I hope that along the way that you will see a picture of what it means to follow Jesus—maybe a picture different than what you might think. And my hope, my prayer, is that at the end of our time together today you might be compelled to follow Jesus in your own life. So let me pray for us.

Father, are God over all. You're God over the villages in Nepal that I've been in the last couple of weeks. You're God over them. You're sovereign over them. And you are God, are sovereign over this gathering in this room right now. I feel like you've entrusted, O God, much to me over the last couple of weeks—understanding of Word in light of what're doing in the world. I pray for an extra measure of grace to bring that to bear on what're doing in this room right now. Lord, I pray for a supernatural anointing from your Spirit on me as I speak, on us as we hear.

And I pray for the couple thousand people in this room right now. You know each of them by name, and I pray that would speak to each of them; that would take Word, in light of what're doing in the world, and would speak in this room. Help us all—including myself—open our eyes now to see; open our ears now to hear what are saying. We pray together that would do a work even in the next few moments by your Spirit here that would echo—it would resound—for glory in our lives in the days to come. So we pray that'd speak to us

and you'd give us grace to hear and grace to obey. We pray these things in the precious name of Christ, based on your promises to us. Amen.

So a little background. It was two weeks ago, late Sunday night, when I set out for Nepal with five other pastors from our faith family to go to Nepal. We were exploring deeper partnership with a ministry that is addressing issues of health and education and trafficking and most importantly church planting in literally the height of all the earth—so the top of the Himalayas where Nepal borders with Tibet. Basically it's as high as you can go up in these mountains and still maintain life.

And there at the top of the world, you have a major spiritual stronghold where the devil has had his way for centuries. The region that we were in is the birthplace of both Hinduism and Buddhism. So, both of these world religions and all of their deception that has affected millions upon millions of people, hundreds of millions of people, both of these world religions were born in this region where we were, in these mountains. Specifically the region we were in is home to 24 Tibetan Buddhist people groups who live and dwell there without the gospel. Almost all of those 24 people groups are totally unreached with the gospel, meaning that they've never heard it. They've never heard what we sang about—in all these songs we sang about today—they've never heard that news. And we were reminded that these are unreached people groups for a reason. They're hard to reach. They're in these remote mountains.

We had to helicopter in to the height of these mountains where we started. It was about 12,000 feet where we landed in this helicopter. We'd trained at Oak Mountain. Ha! Oak-Not-A-Mountain. A tiny hill. When you get to the top of Oak Mountain it's like you've reached the summit at 12—not 12,000, but 1286 feet—and it's like, we've got eleven more of these to go. And so around 12,000 feet we landed, and then over the next six days we hiked about 90 miles out of the Himalayas through village after village after village that just gave definition to urgent spiritual and physical need. Village after village after village that put a face on this phrase that we use a lot around here.

So to start our journey, the first day of our trip, and to read Luke 4. So you don't have to turn there—this is where Jesus said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* So those verses just set the stage for two weeks of walking and living among the poor and the oppressed. So totally disconnected from the outside world. No phone, no email, nothing but walking and dwelling in the middle of the poor and the oppressed. And walking with Christ there.

So to come to this passage—we're in Luke 9:57, the last verses in the chapter. So to trek these trails in the Himalayas with Christ and to read these words one day. Luke 9:57:

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

This passage, without question, has been one of the most influential passages in all of the Bible in my life—and in this church. This is one of the passages that we read and studied in the Radical series we walked through six years ago. But it came to a whole new light these past two weeks, and created a fresh wrestling in me that revolves around these three questions that I am just compelled to ask myself and my life and my family, and for us to ask as people who claim to be followers of Christ.

Remember, these words that we just read are not just for potential followers of Jesus in the 1st century. Like, these are words for followers of Jesus in the 21st century. Jesus here is defining what it means for you to follow Him. He's defining what it means for you to follow, what it means for me to follow Him. So I want us to take these words from Jesus to three men in the 1st century, and consider what they mean for men and women in this room in the 21st century. Three questions I'm compelled to ask my life and this church.

## **Are we going to choose comfort or are we going to choose the cross?**

Number one: are we going to choose comfort or are we going to choose the cross? Are we, in our lives, in our families, in this church, are we going to choose comfort, or are we going to choose the cross? This first man comes up to Jesus, says, "I'll follow wherever go." We know from another passage, Mark 12, that this man was likely a religious teacher who was looking to advance himself. And so Jesus pulls this guy aside and says, "You need to realize the road I'm on..." If you look back up in verse 51, it's a major transition in the book of Luke, where we're told that Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, and He's going to the cross.

So I can just picture Jesus pulling this guy aside and saying, "I want you to look down this road. You say, 'I'll follow wherever go,' well, this road—look past all these crowds that are flocking around me, look past the crowds who one day sing my praises and wave palm branches and bow at my feet—look past all of that. This road's headed to a cross. And by the way, there are no Holiday Inns between here and there. Like, you follow me—you're not even guaranteed a roof over your head. Foxes have holes, birds have their nests—I don't even have a place to lay my head. So this is not a road of comfort. This is a road that leads to a cross."

Which is exactly what we see Jesus saying at other points throughout Luke. Look back earlier in Luke 9:23. What did He say there? He said to all who were around Him, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" Now, we hear those words and we hear, "Take up a cross," and we have reverence, respect for the cross because we should because of what we know it represents. We've got to put our feet in the shoes of the people in the 1st century who are hearing this. The cross was an instrument of death, an instrument of torture reserved for the vilest of criminals.

So Jesus is saying here, "If you follow me, it's not going to be about comfort. It's about... I'm going to a cross." He says the same thing—we don't have turn there now, we'll turn to Luke 14 in a minute—but He says there to a crowd of people, Luke 14:27, "*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*" So clearly choosing the cross over comfort is a requirement for following Christ. Choosing the cross over comfort is a requirement for following Christ. "If you don't bear your own cross, you cannot be my disciple."

Now you think about that in light of other things we've read over the past week in these passages. Jesus is calling potential followers, His disciples, away from comfort at every turn. He's constantly calling them away from comfort. Next chapter, Luke 10:3, He sends out His disciples. He says, *"Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."* That's a call away from comfort. Lambs who want comfort stay with lambs. Lambs going into wolves—that's away from comfort. And He says, *"I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road."* So, "Don't even take anything with you. Just learn to trust in my provision." Not, go to the wolves and fill your life with stuff to help you when you get there. Just go—go toward need, away from comfort.

Then you get to the end of this chapter, chapter ten, and you've got this parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus calls us to go out of our way to love, to love God and to love our neighbor as ourself. Our neediest neighbor, the neighbor that we are least likely to love, least prone to love. Sacrifice your comfort. Help them in their need. That's Luke 10. You get to Luke 11. Look at Luke 11:42. He's speaking to religious leaders, and He calls them out of comfort to need. Luke 11:42, *"But woe to you Pharisees [teachers of the law]! For you tithe the mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."*

Then Jesus says, "You do your religious duties. Great. But you sit back and you turn a deaf ear to injustice around you in the world. Sure, you're in the synagogue every day and you give pennies as a tithe. But you're not showing God's love to the oppressed and the poor. You're keeping most for yourselves." Which is why when you get to Luke 12:15, it's just a stinging indictment. He said to them, Luke 12:15, *"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions,"* in having more and more and more.

*And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"*

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the worldview we live in. Store up all you can. Save it up in barns. Those who have, you get more and more and more—this is success in our culture. It's success. What does God say to this idea of success, in that culture, in our culture? Verse 20, *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

So what does it mean to be rich toward God? You keep going down, you get to verse 32 in this chapter. We read these verses just a couple of weeks ago, when Jesus said, *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* So listen to the command, verse 33. *"Sell your possessions, and give to the needy."* That's a command: sell possessions, give to the needy. *"Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Jesus said, "You're following me? Give your treasure away. Don't store it up in barns—give it away to the needy. Not to store up for more comforts but sacrifice for those in need."

It just goes on and on and on. You get to chapter 16, which we're reading today, chapter 16. The end of that chapter, in verse 14, where—and this is a constant theme in the book of Luke—the Pharisees, listen to this, Luke 16:14, *"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things [all that He was teaching], and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, are those who justify [listen to this] yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."* They loved money. They loved money and they justified it at every turn.

So Jesus tells them this story, verse 19:

*There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."*

Huh? Get the context here. Jesus is talking to religious people who loved money and justified their use of it in light of the culture around them. So He tells them a story of a rich man who had all the comforts he wanted on earth and found himself in hell for eternity. We need to hear this story. We need to hear it, we need to heed it, we need to be careful not to justify ourselves in light of it. Get the picture. We're reading this story in a multi-million-dollar building with millions of dollars of cars parked outside. We're going to leave to spend thousands of dollars on lunch before we go back to literally hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of homes. Like, we are rich people. We're surrounded. We are inundated by the comforts of this world. And meanwhile there are poor outside our gates in this world.

So the area we were in... A study was done about ten years ago in this region of the Himalayas, and they found that half of children in these villages were dying before their eighth birthday. So, half. How many kids do you have? I have four kids and one's about to turn eight. Just think about half not making it there. There's one mom, had 14 children, two of them made it to adulthood. Poverty, disease—I'm not talking about disease like we think about disease. These are children who are dying of diarrhea. That's why they die.

There was one village up on this mountainside that had an outbreak of cholera, this infection of the small intestine that causes diarrhea. And this outbreak of cholera spread in this one village. Poor hygiene, no clean drinking water. And in this one little village, because of a cholera outbreak, 60 people died. We met this one precious little boy from that village—his brother died in that outbreak, his sister died in that outbreak and when his brother and sister died, he was only a month old. His brother died, his sister died, and then his mom committed suicide because of all that was going on in that outbreak. So this one-month-old was left to be passed around among the surviving women of the village just to have nourishment. Just little things. I mean, you take uphill and move on from that.

Little things. There's one girl we met who was playing outside and scratched her face, got her face scratched on a tree or something like that, and it got an infection and it began to take over her skin on both sides of her face, where her skin began to droop down and strain down to where she couldn't close her eyes to blink. So this ministry we were working with, found out about it and helped this girl immediately get to surgery where they could bring that back up and help her. Man, the doctor said, if you had not gotten her here, it was not very long before she was going to go totally blind. Because she got a scratch on her face one day...

In another village we walked into and we see this little house where a boy who was handicapped...and his handicap was seen as curse on his life. So for the first ten years of his life he was chained to this post right next to where the animals are in the barn. They've gone in and helped this boy; hopefully maybe even able to walk. But just story after story after story.

And we were walking through this one village and there's so much need. And they had encouraged us, "Okay, you're going to see people in need. Like, don't just start giving out any food you've got. It's not the best way to address need. There's long-term ways, we're just so..."

So you walk by kids who are just reaching out, wanting anything you've got, and you've got to push them away. These three kids, I remember at one particular village and this one little girl was just... she reached up, she grabbed my hand, and so I was holding her hand, just kind of walking, she was kind of using it to kind of try to reach into the bag, whatever she could get. She was just really aggressive. And I realized, okay, this is not good. So I probably need to pull away, and so I'm trying to pull away; she just got a tight little grip on my hand. And finally I just yanked my hand away and she looks at me with this desperate angry face. And she tries to spit on me; she's just not even able to do that. She ends up just spitting on herself.

Village after village after village. And one of the most evil byproducts of this poverty is sex trafficking. Traffickers will come through villages and just prey on these people in their poverty. They'll sit down with a family who has nothing and say, "I'd like to take your daughter to the city and provide a better life for her. And I'll pay you..." All it takes is about a hundred dollars. "I'll pay you, and I'll provide for your family here." And the family thinks, "We need something and he's going to take our daughter to a better way of life."

And so girls 15, 10, as young as five years old, will be sold by a family to these men who will then take these girls down in Kathmandu, where they will be put in a brothel and they will break them. Drug them; they will rape them repeatedly and then require them to do whatever men who come into these brothels want them to do. Some of these little girls have 15-20 customers a day. And this is their life. Shamed, used, abused; they can't get out. Police corrupt because they're paid off by the traffickers. Traffickers threaten the girls that if they leave, then the traffickers will go back up and kill their families. Some of these girls they keep in Kathmandu, others they take into India or the Middle East or down into Africa. We're talking thousands and thousands of little girls taken from impoverished villages like the ones we were in.

So I'm reading Luke 10, and I'm seeing the greatest commandment is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself, and I'm thinking, "...as myself?" I'm thinking, if this was happening to my daughter...? This is my little girl... I'd do something. I'd do whatever it takes. If this was happening to our girls, we'd do something. We'd make major changes to do something. If this were our kids dying of preventable diseases, this would change the

way we live, wouldn't it? It would change our lives and our families and change the shape of what we're doing as a church.

I mean, look at this group. I mean, I'm in the middle of it, leading it. Just look at even this gathering. Is this what it looks like to gather together a group of people who are sacrificing our lives to make the gospel known in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need? Is this what that looks like? Our lives, our families, church, does it look like this? Does this shout, "These people are sacrificing everything they've got to make the glory of God known in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need"?

One of the bright spots was when we got through these villages that were totally unreached, and finally as we're coming down the mountain, these mountains would get to a place where there are people who are reached and there's a church. And we gather together in this little church gathering—and it's literally a house, and it's, I mean, a tiny room. We counted, I think there was 55 of them and 10 of us total, just crammed in, just sitting on the floor. One light bulb in the middle; just singing in worship and studying the Word...and all it is people and the Word of God and the Spirit of God—that's all it takes. Like, that's enough for them.

It's not enough for us. We need more comforts in the church for us. Like, we've got to ask these questions. In our lives, families, what does it look like to live simply and give sacrificially in our lives, our families? Is it, as a church...? Like we know, we know, things look different when you're in peace time and in war time. Like peace time there's room for comforts, enjoying luxuries and pleasures. Peace time—everything's good. War time, you're in battle. So you're making sacrifices. You're conserving resources. You're doing everything possible to make sacrifices for the success of the victory in the war.

Brothers and sisters, we are not living in peace time. Peace time's coming. New heaven, new earth—it's coming. This is war time that we're living in. Our lives, our families, this church—not just the church in our culture—this church doesn't look like it's war time. Jesus says in Luke 14, "If you're going to count the cost, if you're going into battle," He says, "you count the cost of the battle that lies ahead." This is a battle we're in...this battle being waged for the souls of men and women all around us in the world.

So what would it look like if we counted the cost? What if we looked squarely in the face of 20,000 kids every single day who are dying of starvation from preventable diseases? 20,000 of them in the world. What if we looked squarely in the face of these thousands and thousands and thousands of girls that every year are being trafficked and we said, "We're going to change the way we live, we're going to change what we do, we're going to change the way we're approaching church because we want to love our neighbors as ourselves"?

I know...I know there are complex answers to all of these kinds of problems. I mean, it's hugely complex. It's not easy to address poverty like this or trafficking like this. And I know it's just huge. And so we can start to think, "Well, I mean, what can I do? What can my life do? What can my family do? What can one church do?" I mean, really, in light of the massive need. I know it's complex but the idea that, "I can't do everything so I won't do anything"—that's a lie straight from the pit of hell. Do something. But it comes back to this question: what are we going to choose? Are we going to choose the comforts of this world or are we going to choose the cross?

We've got to ask that question because to choose the cross is to take a deliberate step away from the comforts of this world. Jesus says in Luke 14:33, "*Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*" You might be tempted to think, "Well now,

this is getting kind of deep, like maybe not everybody's mature enough or ready spiritually for this." This was Jesus' opening invitation to the crowds. This is the essence of what it means to follow Christ. This is not radical Christianity. This is biblical Christianity. This is biblically what it means. To follow Christ is to choose the cross over the comforts of this world.

We haven't even talked about...we've just been talking about physical needs. There are urgent spiritual needs.

### **Are we going to settle for maintenance or are we going to sacrifice for mission?**

This is the second question. Are we—you and me, this church—are we going to settle for maintenance or are we going to sacrifice for mission? Are we going to settle for maintenance or are we going to sacrifice for mission? This was that second guy back in Luke 9. Jesus said, "Follow me." He said, "First let me go and bury my father." Some believe this guy's dad was about to die, so he wanted to go back and be with his dad his last couple days and bury him. Others believe his dad had just died.

I remember the first time I ever preached this passage was at a conference. Flew home after the conference, and I got home, got a call from my brother telling me that my dad, my best friend in the world, had just had a heart attack—so pray, pray, pray. So I pray and pray and pray, and then I get a call a few minutes later. My dad had passed away unexpectedly. So to imagine in those moments, hearing the words from Jesus in Luke 9:60, *"Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."* Don't even go to the funeral; there's more important things for you to do. What does that mean? I can't imagine hearing those words in that moment. And clearly, clearly this meaning that if you're following Christ, there is an urgency to going and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. An urgency. Even that which you would most want and need to do—something more urgent and more important—go and proclaim the Kingdom of God. And if that urgency was there in this day, how much more in our day? Where we talk about unreached people groups, so people groups that have little to no access to the gospel. That's what we were in the middle of. So these people groups, I mean, we're walking through these villages at the start of our trekking and there are no believers. Not only no Christians but 99% of the people have never even heard of Christ. It hasn't reached them.

So we're walking through these villages... I remember we would come into this one village and it was just providential—God's timing. We kind of slowed down a bit. But we walked into this village...just happened to walk in at the same time where this one guy walks out of his house and this guy had lost his eyeball, his right eyeball, and it was whatever infection or disease or whatever was just taking apart the side of his face. He was starting to lose his hearing, just going deeper and deeper into his skull. He had kind of a cloth in his eye, that if you took it out you could just see into his skull basically. So he just happens to walk out when we providentially walk in this village.

So we stop, and we talk to him, and this man—we have an opportunity to share with him the story of Jesus healing a blind man, and Jesus' authority over disease, and ultimately Jesus' authority over death. The story of a Man Who's conquered death, the story of a Man Who's able to forgive all your sin, the story of a Man Who is able to give you sight for all of eternity. And it's snowing, so we pick up snow and show it to him, saying, "All the sin and



evil in your heart, He makes...we sang about it, just think about it...white as snow." We don't know if that man trusted in Christ. We prayed, still praying for him. But I was so thankful for this man, who clearly doesn't have long to live—at least he got to hear before he dies.

Before we even went into these villages, we're down in the city, in Kathmandu; we go to this Hindu holy river and this holy site—this temple called Pashupati—and we're there. The way things work is people in surrounding areas, whenever a loved one dies, within 24 hours they bring the body, wrapped, to this river—because it's a holy river—they set up funeral pyres. They're set up all around the river, on both sides there. They set these funeral pyres up to where they'll place the body on top of the funeral pyre and they'll burn the body over the river. So this is supposed to be helpful for them spiritually—reincarnation, all this stuff together.

So to stand there and to see all along this river these burning funeral pyres. Just get the picture, see why it helps to see what I saw, just see bodies burning on these funeral pyres and realize the people you're seeing, those bodies, most if not every single one of them died without ever even hearing the gospel. So you know you're watching their body, their physical body, physically burning, and you know it's a picture of a spiritual reality that's happening at that moment. And nobody ever got to them to tell them there's a way to eternal life.

God, give us the hearts that have a holy discontentment with even the concept of unreached peoples! God, cause that to make us sick to our stomach, the fact... You've got people, groups of people, hundreds of millions of individuals who are dying, and they've never even heard... Like, this is not...this can't be tolerable for us. This can't be, "Move on with your life in casual, comfortable Birmingham Christianity in light of this." No, it's not possible. Not when...not this gospel that we've read in Luke 15 about a Father Who goes running after the lost. We've read, he goes searching for the coin, he loves the lost, He pursues them.

If that's the case, then wouldn't it make sense if God—He loves these people, He desires their salvation, we know that—so wouldn't it make sense then that if that's the case, and we're following Him and we have His heart, that the majority of us are going to be running after those people, too? That the majority of us, like a default, it's going to be we're going to unreached peoples? That any of us who stay here are going to be sacrificing so that we can pay a salary here and a salary for those who are going?

And this is the greatest need. It's the gospel. It's the greatest thing, it's the only...it's the deepest need. It's just the way. And there's ways to address... We need to address poverty, we need to address trafficking, all these things. But at the core, it's the heart that needs to change. It's the heart of people that needs to change. Only the gospel can change the heart. Otherwise you're just putting Band-Aids on broken limbs. There's a need for the gospel, for the church to be planted among these people groups. For them to value women in a different way because they have the gospel in their hearts. And all kinds of byproducts, fruit of the gospel. It's the biggest need.

And you think about...no, let me show you where we were hiking. Just look at a couple of these pictures. I mean, ah. That's what we were helicoptering into. That's not Oak Mountain, okay? And we're hiking and everywhere you look, it's just this majesty around. Look at the next picture. I mean, everywhere, this is the scene. You end up coming down out of the snow and it's just green. So you're in these villages where there's these massive displays of the majesty of God in creation, and His glory is just being declared in the

heavens and they're shouting the glory of God. But you realize all the majesty—you're just in awe, everywhere you look—all the majesty in those mountains is totally insufficient to save souls.

All that does is expose people to the glory of God in a way that, Romans 1:21-23, "*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*" All that's happened for centuries in these mountains where the majesty of God is displayed so clearly—all that it's led to is total idolatry.

They just worship little gods made by human hands and indulge in all kinds of superstitions and practices. I mean, every child, every family in these villages will give their either first or second-born son to the monastery, to the Buddhist monastery, at five years old—they give their son as an offering to the monastery. That son will live in the monastery the rest of his life. So you give your son away to the monastery. This is what's required of you. I mean, there's just all kinds of things. And just superstition after practice after... And you realize, all this in an area where the glory of God is so clearly on display but general revelation is insufficient to save. They need the gospel.

They need the gospel. You and I have got, in our hearts, what those mountains themselves don't contain. We've got the gospel in our hearts. There's people that need to hear—what did He say in Luke 10? "*The harvest is plentiful...*" It's plentiful. There's people, there's people waiting to hear, they're waiting. "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*" How can this be? How can this be? Workers—pray for more workers. Pray for laborers. Then BE the laborers.

Are we going to settle for maintenance or are we going to sacrifice for mission? Are we going to settle for business as usual, coast-along Christianity here in this culture, or are we going to sacrifice, like everything we can, to make this gospel known among the people groups of the world? And sacrifice is the right word there. Sacrifice all across the board. Sacrifice for them.

I remember one village where two people, through this ministry, two people, a couple, a mom and dad, came to faith in Christ. And as soon as they came to faith in Christ, then in a couple of weeks they'd been stoned. Like, it's costly to follow Christ in these villages. You come to Christ in these villages and if you're not killed, you're going to be told you can't stay in the village or you can't use the water source in the village. And you're losing everything. And it's costly for them.

It's costly for us in order to go. This whole ministry, ten years ago when they were starting, they were going up to these villages, that was before foreigners had really gone into these villages. And people would tell them, "You don't need to be here. You need to leave and if you come back we'll kill you." And threats against them. But praise God, they kept coming back. There's fruit beginning to be born from keeping coming...coming back. I in no way want to give the idea that if we're going to sacrifice, if we're going to give ourselves to making the gospel known among unreached peoples more and more and more and more, and we doing it some, by God's grace we're doing it some. But oh, just the tip of the iceberg of what could happen with 4,500 people who will gather here today, filled with the Holy Spirit of God in a world where 6,000 people groups are unreached. Are we going to settle for maintenance or are we going to sacrifice for mission?

## Will our lives be marked by indecisive minds or undivided hearts?

Third question: will our lives—will your life, my life—will our lives be marked by indecisive minds or undivided hearts? Will our lives be marked by indecisive minds or undivided hearts? Luke 9:61-62, the man says, "I'll follow, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." And it's almost as if Jesus knows that if this guy goes back and says goodbye to his family, there's going to be a strong pull there not to go back to follow Jesus. Certainly Mom, Dad, brothers, sisters—people who care about him—"Now, who are you following? Where are you going? What about this? What about this? What about this?" Same kind of questions any one of us in this room would receive from people who love and care about us, if we were to say, "I'm going to go to unreached peoples in this area of the world."

That's what I mean by undivided heart. To follow Christ means that He alone has your heart. It's passages like Luke 14:25-26, where Jesus said, "If you're going to follow me, if anyone's going to follow me, he must hate his father and mother, wife and children, and brother and sister." Remember what He said in Luke 12:51-53?

*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*

How about that for a Christmas text? "Do you think I've come to bring peace on earth? No!" No, He's come to divide allegiance. Now you wrestle with...what does that mean? "I'm supposed to hate my mom and dad and my wife and my kids?? What does that mean?" And this is where we realize, okay, you step back and you read similar words in Matthew 10. "Whoever who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." There's clearly a comparison here. What Jesus is calling us to is to love Him in a way that makes our closest relationships in this world look like hate in comparison. There's such supreme affection for, love for, Christ.

People read those passages and think, "Well, I thought I was supposed to honor my father and mother, I was supposed to love my wife, and love my husband." Well, yes. Here's the deal. The best way to love your family is to give supreme love to Christ. Guaranteed. Guaranteed best way to love your wife, husbands, is to give your affection to Christ and to lead her accordingly. The best way to love your husband is to give your affection to Christ and to follow your husband accordingly. Best way to love your kids...best way to love your kids, is not to give them all the comforts this world says they need. The best way to love your kids is to take up your cross daily and follow Christ wherever He leads. That's the best way to love your kids.

So our lives should be marked by undivided hearts. There's this one—he's like a principal at a school of missions—and he oversees a program every six months where students come in and are training to do ministry all over northern India, Nepal and different countries. And they live in this one place and he and his family oversee that. Well, this is a guy—the guy who oversees this, the principal—he grew up in a Hindu home. When he was 15 his parents died in a car accident and it sent him searching for the next few years. He came across a

Bible and he started reading it, and he ended up coming to faith in Christ, leaving Hinduism behind.

As soon as he did that and he was baptized as a Christian, his brothers came to him and said, "You are now out of the family. You don't have your inheritance anymore. You're on your own." Totally abandoned. So to see this man who was totally abandoned by his family, doesn't have his inheritance anymore, but to see the truth of Mark 10, Luke 18, playing out, where Jesus said, remember where He said, "Anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother, father, forsake and the gospel will not fail to receive a hundred times as much—brothers, sisters." I said to him, "I know you know this but you look around. Praise God, you've got brothers and sisters that you never could have imagined who are now serving all over south Asia for the spread of the gospel." And he looked at me, he said, "It's kind of like a hundredfold." I said, "Yeah."

Christ is worthy of an undivided heart. But here's where this is to me just being totally vulnerable. I get...I'm so prone to an indecisive mind. Okay? The Lord convicts my heart and I think, "All right, something needs to change." But then I get so hesitant. I'm like, "Okay, I don't.... What exactly do I need to do?" It's not that that's not a good question to ask but what I mean by indecisive mind is I'll just keep asking that question, and I'll find a month later, a year later, not a whole lot's changed. I'm still praying about it, you know? But I've been praying about what? What am I waiting for? Like I'm walking by a body of water, a lake, and I see a child in the lake drowning, I don't say, "Well, let me pray about what to do. Let me consider my options." Like, I know, you go. I go. I help child. There's need. We've been given the command, the commission. It's there. Like in plain black and white, or red if your Bible's like that. Like it's there. Need's there, Word's there—well, what are we waiting for? His will has been revealed to us. So may our lives not be marked by indecisive minds. For years we're just thinking about, praying about, "What do I need to...? I know I need to do something."

Let's do something! Let's act! According the Spirit, His leadership in the Word, let's act. Sacrifice for mission. Embrace the cross. Go. I'm just convinced more and more the default... If there's this many people who've never heard the gospel—shouldn't the default be us going to them? He's got to tell us to stop. We've got to wait for confirmation to stop, not to go. And to do this—hear this, this is so important—to do all of this, why? Why embrace the cross? Why sacrifice for mission? Why abandon ourselves? Why...? Why...? Because He loves us. He loves us. He's created us for this. He's created us for this. Stop buying the lie that what is best for us is what the devil's selling in our culture. We're fools. He loves us. He knows what's best for us.

There was one point at the very end of the trip where me and one of our pastors were sitting in a little coffee house processing some of the things we'd seen, in particular on the trafficking side of things. And we were just, just me and him, sitting across this little coffee table, just crying and praying. And when we finished praying, we were just kind of sitting there in silence and these two girls come up to us. And they said, "Ah, can we pray for you?"

And my first thought is, "What are you a Christian or..?" And apparently, they start telling us that they're missionaries and they said, "We just saw you guys over here and we thought you could be prayed for." And we're like... We said, "We're emotional wrecks right now, so we'd love for you to pray for..." And it was just providential. These two girls just pray over us. And they pray that we would know God's love for us. And they pray that we would know that God has us where He has us for a reason. To be confident in where He's leading us.

And it was just this beautiful reminder, in the midst of deep conviction, that that conviction is evidence of the love of God for me, and the love of God for the world around me.

So we need not be afraid of that conviction. We embrace it. I mean, this is the gospel, right? The Father in heaven has come running after you. He's pursued you. God in heaven has pursued you! Right where you're sitting. He's been running after you, Christian.

Non-Christian, hear this. The God of heaven loves you. He desires for you to know Him. So much so that He has sent His Son to sacrifice for us. Like, He chose the cross—praise God—He chose the cross over the comforts of this world. And He did it for your sin and my sin. He did it to take away our sin, so that our souls would be washed free from sin, white as snow. Look for God. He loves you.

And then, then He ascended into heaven. He's risen from the grave—Jesus is alive, at the right hand of the Father. Ephesians 2, He's seated us with Him in the heavenlies. We are alive with the risen Christ. We have nothing to fear in this world. We have nothing to fear. We have nothing we need from this world. We've been given eternal life.

We're here for a blip on the radar, like a mist, a vapor. We're here for just a little bit and then we're gone. All of us are on like a short-term mission trip, for 70 or 80 years max, right? We're not even guaranteed tomorrow, not necessarily that long.

So God, make this mist count! Help us not to waste time. We don't have time to waste. Just got a little bit of time. We're standing on the porch of eternity with billions of years in front of us. We don't have time to waste now. Jesus didn't die to make Birmingham, Alabama, comfortable for us. That's not the point of His death. He died to give us an eternal home. He rose from the grave, ascended into heaven, put His Spirit down inside of us, Who has clothed us with power for...comfortable, casual, cultural Christianity? No! He's clothed us with power for a mission. For a mission. So, then business as usual will be intolerable for us. Unreached peoples? Intolerable for us. May throwing scraps to the poor in our lives be intolerable for us.

So more than anything, I want to call you... I don't know. I don't know what specifically this means for your life and your family. Or even altogether for us as a church. I know it means I, you, we—we need to do something. We need to follow the Spirit's leadership. So more than anything—as this kind of comes to a close—I want to point you to Christ and to His Spirit and I want to call you to go to Him. I want to call you to go to Him with abandon. Renounce everything you have and say, "My life's yours in a fresh way. My life's yours, my possessions are yours. What do you want me to sell? You told me to sell possessions—what do I need to sell? You know, my plans, my dreams—they're yours. There's things I've got on my list that I think I want or need to do—but more important than those is proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. So what do I need to do?"

And I don't think it's coincidence that this week is the week in this first part of the year that we've set aside as a week for us to pray and fast, particularly on Wednesday as our day of prayer and fasting. So I want to call us to fast and to pray this week. I want to call you to gather together in this room on Wednesday night, at the end of a day of fasting and praying, and let's seek the Lord together. In our lives, in our families—let's fast and pray for unreached peoples, for the spread of the gospel to them, for urgent physical need in the world, for the demonstration of the gospel in the middle of that, for all these needs which I mentioned today. And then praying for workers to go and asking the Lord, "Am I the worker that needs to go?"

And fast and pray. Put aside food, say, "More than I want food, I want, God. More than I want my hunger to cease, I want your will to be done in my life." And then let's gather together on Wednesday night in this room and let's gather and fill this place and just seek His face together. That's...more than anything, I want to call us to Christ, to His love for us, and to give Him undivided heart and to see what He does.

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