

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today. We are in a season called the Hope Carrier Initiative. We're talking about, what does it look like to live on mission with God? What does it look like to change our world? What does it look like to live in the kingdom of God in the midst of this world? All we're doing is acting like God is real. Like God is good, like what God says is true.

What we're doing in this series in this season is we're just letting God stir things up in our soul, speak to the deep purposes in our heart, believing like His kingdom is here and more of it is to come. We're just taking next steps. We're walking by faith. We're practicing our faith. We're moving forward. We're trusting. We're risking. We're walking with God. This is what a movement of hope for the city and beyond looks like. As we move forward, one of my jobs, one of my roles in the assignment that God has given to me, is to pay attention and call attention to that which God is doing among us. Part of my job is to just pay attention and then bring your attention to that which God is doing across our church. As I look at what God is doing in this season, He is doing a deep work in us as He's releasing His work through us.

You see, we've been saying that a hope carrier is simply a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. I think when we got into the series we thought we were going to talk a lot about changing our world, but where I think God is working on us is being a disciple. I think we got into this thinking it's going to be a mission and changing our world, it's going to be amazing. Here's where I think God's moving - in here. Submission, surrender, becoming a student, a learner, a follower, one who actually becomes like the one that they're following. God is doing a deep work in here. If the kingdom only flows through a surrendered will, then if we want to see the kingdom flow, we've got to surrender our will, and this is what God is doing. It's a season of surrender, humility, brokenness. It's a season of saying, "Not my will, but Yours." Picking up our cross and following Him.

In fact, I love when Jesus says, "If anyone" – us right now – "would come after him, He must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the Gospel will save it." Can I just tell you, I think this verse is what's happening right now. We are coming after Him, and so we're denying ourselves. We're picking up our cross, and we're losing our life so that we can find it. Can I just weather-forecast for you for a second? I'll say that to our staff, sometimes, "Hey, let me just weather-forecast and tell you what I see coming. Because if you know it's going to rain, then you're okay, because you were prepared and you were expecting it." Okay. Here's some weather-forecasting for you. As you're following Jesus and moving forward, don't be surprised if you've already been experiencing or if you will experience edginess in yourself, a sense of frustration, a sense of tension building up. Don't be surprised if you find yourself having old sin patterns come back to the surface.

If all of a sudden, that mental health challenge you thought were on top of shows back up with a vengeance. Don't be surprised if, in this season, inside of you, there is all kinds of edginess

and frustration and reaction. Why? Because you are moving into the kingdom of God and flesh can't come with you. Your flesh can't live in the kingdom. Flesh can't come into the kingdom. As you're moving forward into the kingdom, your flesh is reacting. Your flesh wants comfort and convenience and control. It wants everything to be easy and to feel good, and all those different kinds of things, so your flesh is literally reacting. I'm watching people around me. I mean it's everywhere guys, I see it everywhere. Wherever you're at, look at the person next to you, they'd be like, "It's you." Edginess, tension, frustration, and it makes sense. Why? Because we're denying ourselves, literally dying to our flesh, picking up our cross, crucifixion.

You realize crucifixion is not fast, it's long and slow and painful. But you got to have a crucifixion if you want to have a resurrection. We're losing our lives so that we can find His life. Don't be surprised. What's happening is, listen to me, movement creates friction. You're moving forward, so there's a friction in your life. Don't be discouraged by it. In fact, I love this. It says, "Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Memorize this, meditate on this week, "Count yourself" – consider, reckon, understand, and believe you're – "dead to sin." You're now "alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies, so that you obey its evil desires." It says, "Don't let sin reign." We've been talking about that word "reign" in this series. Reign means to be king, to have the highest influence.

It says, "Hey, sin no longer has the highest influence in your life. He is no longer king." Why? Because you're dead to it, and you're alive to God in Christ. "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness." Your flesh only has the authority you give to it. Your mind, your thoughts, your words, your body, your actions, your emotions, your feelings - they don't control you. You're dead to it. It doesn't reign anymore. It only has the authority you give to it, so if you choose to surrender to it, yes, it takes over. But if you choose to offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, now I'm living free, "For sin shall not be my master. Because now I'm not under the law, I'm under grace."

This verse alone is worth memorizing in your heart, to say, "Oh my gosh. I do not have to live as a victim to my own flesh because I'm moving into the kingdom." So, there's some things that are dying. There's some things that are being broke off. There's some things that are coming to the surface, but God's grace is dealing with them in my life right now. See, think about it like this, if you've ever climbed a mountain, as you go up that mountain you've got to acclimatize. It's a different atmosphere and environment, so you might get sick, you might get a headache, you might get disoriented. If you've ever been scuba diving and you've been under for a while, and you're coming back up, you have to decompress. As you come back up from all that pressure you were under, you might feel sick and you'll have a headache and be disoriented a little bit. If you've ever fasted, it sounds really good to fast, and then about an hour into it, the headache, the toxins, your body is screaming. But if you push through it, there is a breakthrough and a freedom.

You're going to a new place. You've been so used to living in the ways of the world, you're so used to living according to the flesh, you're so used to letting sin reign, you're so used to living like everybody else, that all that stuff is now coming to the surface and your flesh is trying to get you to react and go backwards. God says, "Don't give up. Don't give up. Keep going, keep moving." There is a freedom and a breakthrough that you're experiencing. Don't be surprised if you're edgy, and frustrated, and that thing has come back to the surface. You with me on that? Come on. It's why He says, "I will say to you, walk, live habitually in the Holy Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit];" – because the spirit is now in control, not my flesh – "then you will certainly not gratify the cravings and the desires of the flesh [human nature without God]." You want a definition for flesh? It's human nature without God. But you are no longer controlled by it for you have been crucified with Christ.

It's no longer you who live, it's Christ who lives within you. You are no longer controlled by the mind of the flesh, but by the spirit of the living God. Put off your old self, and put on your new self, created to be new in Christ Jesus. Don't feel discouraged and don't be defeated because there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in this world." "For when I am weak, then I am strong." So keep surrendering. Keep submitting. Keep humbling. Keep being broken. Just confess and acknowledge, "Hey [husband, wife, mom, dad, brother, sister, coworker], my flesh is dying right now, so I know I'm really edgy." You just killed it some more. Because you didn't defend it, you confessed and repented of it. I'm going into the kingdom and my flesh can't come with me, so there's some things that are coming off of me as I'm moving forward. That's what's happening. That's what's happening. Say it with me. That's what's happening. That's good, and Jesus is going to keep going with you.

See, He's not just Lord and Savior, He's a teacher. The Bible says He's rabbi, teacher. He wants to teach you how to live in the kingdom of God. In fact, when His disciples ask Him, say, "Jesus teach us how to pray." He says, "Okay. Start with, 'Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.'" Jesus says, when you pray, come to the table, kind of already deciding that you're surrendering your will to His. Because the kingdom of God is where God's will is done. "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." For God's kingdom to come, His will has to be done. His will, His wants, His desires, His choices. Wherever His will is not done, His kingdom has yet to come. See, God has a kingdom – the king's domain, an area that He rules and reigns over. He has a will of what He would like to see in His kingdom. He does it through words and actions, and everything that submits and surrenders to His words and actions is a part of His kingdom.

You have been given a kingdom, a domain that you rule and reign over. It might be your body, it might be your mind, it might be your room, it might be your business, it might be your house, it might be your finances. You might have multiple areas that you rule and reign over. The question is, are you willing to submit and surrender your domain to His kingship? "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Why on earth? Because in

Heaven, everything is already submitted and surrendered to His will. On Earth, it needs to come, why? Because there are kings and kingdoms, and queens and queendoms that are doing their own thing. The greatest barrier for God's kingdom to come is your will and mine. Are you willing to submit it and surrender it? We not only have the privilege, we have the responsibility as the followers of Jesus, to bring Heaven to earth.

In fact, this is why Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given unto you." The life you want is found in His kingdom. Surrender yourself to His kingdom, His will and His righteousness. We said last week, His righteousness is His goodness. So surrender yourself to His will and His goodness. This is so important. You will only surrender to His will to the level you believe He is good. You will only surrender your will to the level you believe God is good. Anywhere you choose to do things your way is a place that you question the goodness of God. When I do my sexuality my way, and my finances my way, and my freedom my way, and my time my way, and my thoughts my way, I don't believe God is good in that space. That's why I do it my way. But give thanks to the Lord for He is good.

If He's good, then all He can ever do is good things. All He can ever say, all He can ever do, all He can ever require, all He can ever command is something that is good. When I learn that He is good, I will submit and surrender myself to His will. If this is His will and this is His goodness, then it's basically saying surrender yourself to God's desire to be good to you. His will, His desire, His choice, His heart, to His righteousness, to His goodness – God's desire is to be good to you and take care of everything in your life. In other words, God has a goodwill towards you. This is so important to get. God's desire is to be good to you – goodwill. If you've ever heard Charlie Brown Christmas, right, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests," or, "Goodwill to men on whom His favor rests," right. Goodwill. Do you know the word "agape"? The word "love" in the Bible, it literally translates "goodwill."

Good will – God's desire is to be good to you. When you understand He has a goodwill towards you, you start to have a goodwill towards others. Your desire is to be good to them. Because I am able to submit and surrender myself to His will to be good to me and take care of everything in my life. The problem is, we want to be our own king or our own queen. We want to do what we want, when we want, how we want, right. But we said last week, we said, here's the problem. If you want to be your own king or your own queen, you've got to take that all the way out there. You can do what you want, when you want, how you want, but then you've got to fight your own battles, you've got to protect your own borders, you've got to provide for yourself, you've got to make it happen, and you've got to hold it all together. Do you still want to be king at that point? A lot of us say, "Well, I want to do what I want, when I want, how I want, I just want God to come and fight the battles, extend the borders, and provide for me, and make everything happen."

Just understand, then you would be king and He would be your servant, because you would be expecting Him to do your will instead of submitting and surrendering your will to Him. Now,

here's why I'm re-saying all of that. You know how we keep saying that the reason we get angry is because someone crosses or challenges our will? When God doesn't do what we want, when we want, how we want, I think a lot of times we then get angry at God, because He challenged or crossed our will. Can I ask you a really honest question? Are you mad at God? And you might not quickly and easily say that, are you mad at God because He didn't do what you wanted, when you wanted, how you wanted? Your cry was "my kingdom come, my will be done, in my space as it is in my heart."

Maybe He didn't do it that way. Maybe you really need to reconsider His desire to be good to you and take care of everything, and surrender your kingdom to Him, because everybody wants a king like Jesus. Everybody needs a king like Jesus, as good and as compassionate and as kind and as merciful and as powerful as Jesus. This is why the gospel is good news. "Jesus went to all the cities and villages," – He came to everybody; it's available to everyone, including you – "teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom." The good news of the kingdom. Gospel means good news. News is something that has happened, and because it has happened, it changes everything going forward. What's the good news? The good news is that the kingdom is accessible and available to anyone and everyone who wants it through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That now changes everything.

It is not about getting to Heaven some day. It is about living in the kingdom of God in the here and now. Are you with me on all of that? Okay. Here's where I've been trying to get for the last three weeks. The gospel of the kingdom, and if you've been here, you know The Three Circles. But you've probably never realized that is the good news of the kingdom. If you've never been here and you've never heard The Three Circles before, it is a way of contextualizing the fullness of the gospel of the kingdom. Walk or just -- right now just say, "Holy Spirit, give me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to receive the good news of the kingdom because this is the message of Jesus." See, in Jesus, we receive His grace, experience His presence and release His kingdom. He restores our identity, He reconciles our relationship, and He redeems our purpose. It's not about getting to Heaven when you die, it's about being restored in every way.

This is the gospel of the kingdom and it all starts with grace. You have been saved by grace through faith. This is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God so that no man can boast. The word "save" in the Bible literally means "to save, to heal, to make whole, to set free and deliver." It doesn't mean "to Heaven when you die," it means to be whole and to be restored in every way, shape, and form in the here and the now. There's three words you have to understand - judgement, mercy, and grace. Judgement is when you get what you do deserve. Mercy is when you don't get what you do deserve. And grace is when you get what you didn't deserve. Judgement, you get what you deserve. Mercy, you don't get what you do deserve. Grace, you get what you didn't deserve. On the cross, Jesus was judged on our behalf. He got what we deserved, so we could experience grace and get what He deserved.

He not only forgives our sins, He credits our account. He not only cancels the debt, He literally restores our identity, makes us a new creation, gives us a completely new nature, and includes us in Himself. Which means that everything that is true of Jesus is now true of you. You say, "Well, where do you get that?" "As He is, so we are in this world." Because, "As He is so we are in this world." Because He is righteous, so am I. Because He is holy, so am I. Because He is loved, so am I. Because He is free, so am I. Because He is in the kingdom, so am I. Everything that is true of Him is now true of me because I've been included in Him. This is the kind of grace that we're talking about. In fact, this is an incredibly foundational verse to know. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners" – identity statement.

This is not an action, it's an identity statement – "so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous." Not an action statement, an identity statement. So through the un-surrendered will of Adam, you became – identity – a sinner. But through the surrendered will of Jesus, you are now righteous. See if you can catch this. When you were born, you were born in a prison of sin. You were born as a sinner. That was the extent and the expanse of your life. You are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you are a sinner. You are not a sinner because you sin; you sin because you're a sinner. Why? Because identity determines behavior. Who you are determines what you do. You were born as a sinner. It's an identity statement. The extent of your life is a life of sin. That's all you can do, because you can only do who you are.

You were born in this prison of sin and there was nothing you could do to get yourself out of it. We shouldn't be surprised when the world does broken things because their identity is broken. It is the extent of what they can do. There was nothing good you could do to get out of that. But then Jesus came, and He rescued you from the prison of sin and He puts you into a position of righteousness. You're now righteous, not because you live righteously. You live righteously, because you now are righteous. Because identity determines behavior. Who you are, determines what you do. Just like there was nothing good you could do to get out of the prison of sin, there is nothing bad you can do to get out of this position of righteousness. The Bible literally says you are a slave to righteousness. It uses that word. Why? Because you can't free yourself. You were a slave to sin, couldn't free yourself. You are a slave to righteousness, you can't free yourself, because it's your identity.

You have no authority or ability to change your identity. It's who you are in Jesus. In fact, this is why it says, "God made Him" – Jesus – "who had no sin to be sin for us" – on the cross – "so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." It's who you now are. This is where we need our faith to grow. Come on. The Bible says faith comes by [hearing.] Whatever I'm hearing, my faith in that thing grows. If you've ever wondered why we don't spend all of our time talking about how bad you are, and how much sin is in your life, and how you should try so much harder; it's because you don't need your faith to grow in that anymore. We spend all our time talking about Jesus and who He is and what He has done, because we all need our

faith to grow in the goodness of His grace, not in the strength of sin. Come on. If we spend more time talking about what we have to do than what Jesus has done, something is wrong.

Because on the cross, He said, "It is finished." Not, "I'm working on it." Come on. Think about this. The Holy Spirit now dwells inside of you. If the Holy Spirit lives inside of you that means you are now holy. The temple was holy, not because of the gold or the silver, but because the Holy Spirit was there. You are not holy because of what you do, but because the Holy Spirit is in you and He only dwells in holy places. You with me on this? Come on. When Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water, and the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." He's 30 years old, He hasn't done any miracles yet, and the Father declares His identity and says He loves Him and He is pleased in Him. If you're included in Jesus, then that means you are the Father's beloved son or beloved daughter in whom He is well pleased. Before you do anything right and even after you do everything wrong.

You don't have to spend your life getting the world to say what the Father already has, that He is pleased with you and that He loves you. You are free. You are as loved in this moment as you will ever be in your life. What are you trying to prove and who are you trying to prove it to? You are more than a sinner saved by grace. You, now, are the Father's beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. Yet, religion makes us walk around with the Eeyore spirit. "Oh, well, I guess, I'll always just be a sinner." No! That might feel really good to your flesh, but that's just not true. You can't have two identities. You're either a sinner or you're righteous. You're either under the curse of Adam or the redemption of Jesus. You're either a new creation or you are not, so which one are you?

You say, "But I still sin." I know. You're acting according to who you no longer are. You're learning to die to the flesh and live as a butterfly. Now you don't need to crawl around in the mud anymore. I know it sounds really good to say, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace." But don't you think it honors God when we call ourselves beloved sons and daughters, instead of worthless sinners? Doesn't it take more faith to believe that you are righteous even when you're aware of your current failures? When God tells you who you are, no one, including yourself, can tell you who you're not. We receive His grace. He restores our identity, and then it draws us into experiencing His presence or a reconciled relationship. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence." Because of what Jesus has done, God's throne is a throne of grace; not judgement, condemnation, anger, harshness. It's grace. We can go with confidence.

"In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." You can approach God with a full freedom and a confidence that He wants you, that He has accepted you, that He loves you because of what Jesus has done. In fact, you can be as close to God as you want to be. You are as close to God, right now, as you want to be. The only distance that exists between you and God is that which you choose, because He already chose to close the gap. He already chose to move in as close as possible, and now, He's just asking you, "Do you want to turn your heart to Me with freedom and with confidence, fully known,

fully loved, with no fear of rejection?" He will never leave you nor forsake you. In fact, "'I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty." The Lord Almighty, maker of Heaven and earth has come down to be a Father to you.

You see, Jesus, in the only place where He defines eternal life, says, "This is eternal life:" that they will go to Heaven when they die. Man, I'm really hitting that hard in this series, aren't I? "This is eternal life: that they may know you." The word "know" does not mean "know," it means "relationship experience." You don't have to wait till you die to experience eternal life, you can have it right now. You can be as close to God as you want to be, because He has been forgiven much loves much and I'm not afraid of Him anymore. Then, as I experienced His presence, I move into this place of releasing His kingdom, living a redeemed purpose. Because all of a sudden, I wake up one day, and I realize I've been empowered by God. I've been commissioned to rule and reign with him. I've been sent as Jesus was sent with the power and authority in my life. I don't have to wonder why I'm here. "Be fruitful, and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." Let's go. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations." I'm in.

How about this, "When Jesus had called the twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons, to cure diseases. He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." To destroy the works of the devil – power and authority. Authority – the right to do it. Power – the ability to do it. Authority is about having the right to do something, power is about having the ability to do something. You and I are in many places in our lives where we have the right, but not the power. Sometimes, we have the power, but not the right. Jesus gave them both – the power, the ability and the right, the authority to go and destroy the works of darkness. Here's the question, when did He take it back? Because clearly, we all live our lives like He took it back. When did He take it back? He actually doubled down on it.

The resurrected Jesus, "All authority has been given unto Me, therefore, go and make disciples." Acts 1:8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." He actually doubles down and gives us the ability and the right to go and drive out demons, cure diseases, preach the kingdom, and heal the sick. A lot of us look at this, and we're like, "I can't do any of that bro." I know, in yourself, you can't. That's the point. But the gospel of the kingdom says you can. We might say, "Well, I can preach the kingdom. I can tell people about Jesus, but I can't do the other things." Make no mistake that it takes just as much power and authority to preach the kingdom as it does to heal the sick. Because preaching the kingdom is about taking someone who is dead in their sin and bringing them to life in God. It's actually a resurrection from the dead, which I would submit to you is harder than "heal the sick." Power and authority, right and ability that He has given to you. You don't have to spend your life wondering why I'm here! You don't have to do the insecure teenager years.

You don't have to do the wandering 20s. You don't have to do the disillusioned 30s. You don't have to do the midlife crisis 40s and 50s. This is hitting too close, isn't it? You don't have to do



the regretful 60s or the purposeless 70s and 80s. You're like, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm here to release the kingdom of God. I walk with Him. I've been entrusted with a purpose." Where this crossover is the kingdom of God; the Father's heart. Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, but by me." Jesus is the way, but the Father, the kingdom, is the destination. Now, see how these work together. When I receive His grace, I'll experience His presence and I'll release His kingdom. When I know who I am, I know who He is, and I know what I'm created to do. If I believe I'm a beloved son, I will run to the Father, and I will spend my life building His kingdom.

When I know I'm forgiven, I will never be afraid of Him, and I will want to be a part of what He is doing. But if I resist His grace, I'll avoid His presence. I'll spend my life building my own kingdom. If I don't know who I am, I don't know who He is, and I won't know what I'm created to do. If I believe I'm a spiritual orphan, I will be terrified of God, and I will spend my life taking care of myself. If I am full of shame and guilt and condemnation, I will avoid God with everything I've got, and I will try to do things to pay for my past. The problem is, a lot of us, we invert this. We start here and we do a bunch of stuff so God will accept us, so we can pay for our past. We try harder, behave better, perform, earn, strive, struggle; try to do all these things, so that God will accept us so that some day I can be forgiven and be significant. This is the cycle of performance and it is an exhausting way to live.

You don't have to do to become, you do because you already are. You don't have to live your life to become accepted. You live from acceptance. You don't have to live from approval, you live for approval. You don't have to live for significance, you live from significance. You are already as loved in this moment as you will ever be in your life. All you need to do is look at the behaviors in your life, and see where they're off, and track them back to where the broken belief is. If you're constantly anxious, maybe it's because you don't really trust God. Maybe you don't trust God because the spirit of condemnation or fear is working in your life. If you're always stressed out, maybe it's because you believe God is distant and somewhere way out there and you believe that you're an orphan who has to take care of themselves. If you're always performing, maybe you believe that God's demanding and no one loves you for who you are, but for what you do.

If you're constantly sinning in your life, you probably believe that God is mad at you, and it's probably because you don't believe that you're a new creation, yet, in Christ Jesus. Are you with me on this? See, identity determines behavior. Who you are, determines what you do. Now, legacy people that have been around here, help me out at all campuses, right. Identity determines behavior. Fish swim; birds fly; cows moo; dogs bark; cats meow. Wow, that was good. Half annoy, half meow, we've got it. Okay. We've done this a time or two. Sinners sin; righteous people live righteously; beloved sons and daughters live free in their Father's kingdom. Disciples learn to live like Jesus. Hope carriers change their world. See, we try to change how people behave. God tries to change how people believe, because your beliefs determine your behaviors.

Whatever you really believe is how you actually behave. In fact, to believe something is to act as if it were so. To believe something is to act as if it were so. If I really believe it, then I act as if it was true. Why do you get on an airplane? Because you believe it will fly. You act as if it were so. The problem for American Christianity is, we say we believe a lot of things, but we behave as if it wasn't so. Hence hypocrisy and confusion and disorientation, because I say I believe that or this person says they believe that, but then they behave like this. It's the great cry of every next generation. Every generation's next generations' cry is, "You do things differently than what you say." It's because they don't actually believe this.

They say it, but they don't actually believe it, because to believe something is to act as if it were so. If I believe God is good, I will act as if it were so. If I believe I'm a beloved son or daughter, I will act as if it were so. If my behaviors don't align with what I say I believe, then I don't actually believe that thing, is what I'm trying to tell you. Listen, some of you have heard me teach this 50 times, and you say you're a beloved son or daughter. But if you look at your life, you live with the spirit of an orphan – hiding, hoarding, hating, skeptical, offended, poverty mindset. It's not because there's something wrong with you, it's because you have yet to really believe that in Jesus, you are a beloved son. It's why the Bible says, "Believe and obey," right. Faith and actions. Why? Because if I actually believe it, I will obey it or act as if it were so. Faith, it's just belief in the unseen.

If I believe in something that is unseen, I will act as if it were so. What does that show you about what you say you believe versus how you actually act? That's what Jesus is trying to change in us. Are you with me on this? You see, you need God's grace for more than the forgiveness of your sins. You need God's grace for supernatural empowerment to live differently. In fact, if you had never sinned, you would still need God's grace. We have reduced grace down to forgiveness. That's part of it, but it's supernatural empowerment. Adam needed grace to tend to the garden. Noah needed grace to build the ark. Moses needed grace to free the Israelites. Gideon needed grace to free the -- to fight the Midianites. A lot of 'ites.' David needed grace to defeat Goliath, right. We actually need God's grace to empower us to live differently.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It" – grace – "teaches us to say no to ungodliness" – the flesh – "and worldly passions and live self controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good." It says grace teaches us how to live differently. If we will teach people grace, grace will teach people how to live. Grace, the grace of God, undeserved favor, but supernatural empowerment; not just the forgiveness of our sins; the empowerment to live according to a new reality in the kingdom as a new creation. The question for you is, are you growing in grace? Are you saying no to your flesh? Are you living a more godly life in this present age?

Not salvation. "Well, I'll be godly when I die." No, right now, this present age; like right here, right now. Are you growing in an eagerness to do what is good?

This is grace. No one has to tell a butterfly to stop crawling in the mud. It was a caterpillar, and that's all it could do. It's now a butterfly, and it knows it's different, and so it begins to step into that new reality. This is why we have to understand it before we go out here to circle three. We've got to make sure we get circles one and two, because you need grace and presence, or you're going to be a hype carrier, doing a bunch of things in your own strength without power and authority. Pulling it all together; it's all over the Bible. Genesis 1, "Let us make man in our image" – identity – "likeness" – relationship – "and let them rule" – purpose. Ezekiel, "I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" – grace – "I will put my Spirit within you" – presence – "and I will move you to keep My commands, decrees and laws" – you'll live different.

"Jesus designated them apostles" – identity, He declared their identity. Mark 3, "that they might be with Him" – the very next thing it says, presence – "that He might send them out to heal the sick, cast out demons, and preach the kingdom." You're a new creation in Christ. Identity, You've been reconciled with God. Relationship. You are now an ambassador of Christ. Purpose. The prodigal son. "My son has come home." The Father gives Him a hug and then gives him the robe, the ring, and the sandals. This, my friends, is the gospel of the kingdom. This is the life of Christ. This is the life of God. This is the kingdom of God, and you can't separate these three. We often want to separate them. We say, "I love grace," or, "I love presence," or, "I love purpose." You can't separate them and still have the gospel of the kingdom. You can have your gospel or a variation of a religious gospel, but I need all three of them because this is the gospel of the kingdom.

"I love being a beloved son or daughter." But you forget that you were also created to enjoy His presence. "I love to worship and I love to be with God." But you forget that there is also a mission that we are on. "I love the mission of God and doing and serving and making disciples." But you forget that there is a school of identity that you never graduate from. And you've got to go back through it again. "I love discovering this identity, but I forget that I'm supposed to be with God in what I do." "I love being with God, but I forget that He has called me to serve others." Make sense? You can't have one of the circles. Here's what religion does. Religion tries to tell us that we can have one of them, pick the one you like. Too often this is what we do in church. We just pick one we like, and then we just hammer it and that's all we talk about. We're like, "Yes, we're the worship church." "We're the grace church." "We're the church that serves the city." How about, let's be all three? How about, let's all as individuals, be all three?

Because grace leads me to presence and presence leads me to purpose. The question is simply this, whose will wins in your life, yours or His? "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." The gospel, the good news of the kingdom, the rule and reign of God, is available and

accessible to anyone and everyone here today. Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, you can have a new identity, you can be as close to God as you want to be, and you can actually have a purpose in this life that's bigger than yourself. Is this the gospel that you have heard? Is this the gospel that you believe and do you act as if it were so?

Because if the goal of our life is sin management, then we are in danger of living a radically inferior life to the one God created for us. If the goal of your life is religion, you are in danger of living a radically inferior life to the one God created you for. If the goal of your life is worldly success, you are in danger of living such an inferior life to the one that God created and redeemed for you. The kingdom of Heaven is like a man who found a treasure in a field and he buried it again. And went and sold all he had to come and buy that field. That man never once again would have talked about how much it cost him. Because he knew the treasure was so much better than what he had to give up to get it. When you understand the gospel of the kingdom, you no longer complain about all the flesh and worldly things you have to give up.

Because you're living free in the very life of God. The life of God is available to you. "Jesus went about all the cities and villages" – He came to Valley Creek Church – "teaching in the synagogue and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease." Jesus has come to declare the good news of the kingdom to you. To teach you how to live in the good news of the kingdom, and to demonstrate, to heal, to set free, to deliver, to make you whole in every way, shape, and form. Anxiety doesn't have to be your king. Depression doesn't have to be your king. Your past doesn't have to be your king. Your future doesn't have to be your king. Your performance doesn't have to be your king. Jesus can be your King.

"I am not ashamed" – embarrassed; I don't need to make an excuse or justify it; I don't even need to cognitively understand – "the gospel" – the good news that the kingdom is available to me in the here and now. "Because it is the power of God" to do for me that which I could never do for myself – to save me, to make me whole, to set me free, to deliver me. Not just Heaven one day, not just forgiveness of sins, a new identity, a reconciled relationship and a redeemed purpose to me in the here and now, today. I want to stop there. In fact, will you just close your eyes with me for a moment? Here's my question. How do you need to respond to the declaration of the gospel of the kingdom?

What does it look like, in the here and now, to repent and turn, turn from the world, turn from your flesh, from sin and towards the life of God? What does it look like to repent and renew your mind, to realize there's so much more, and God is so good that He has come to you. Maybe you need to be like the woman with the flow of blood. "If I could just grab a hold of Him, I will be made whole." Maybe you need to be like the man with a demon possessed boy. "Jesus, I do believe, but help me in my unbelief!" Maybe you need to be like the blind man. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Or maybe you just need to be like Peter, and just say, "Lord, I'm finally ready to give it all up – the boat, the business, the religion, my understanding, the expectations, the knowledge, all of it and I want to come follow you. Because I just found a treasure in a field that is unlike anything else this world has to offer." How do you need to respond to the gospel of the kingdom? You just stay seated for a moment and will you just wrestle through that question. Holy Spirit, come with power and authority and move in our lives, for Your kingdom is here.