

Come on, it's Jesus that makes the darkness tremble. Why don't you go ahead and grab your seat, whatever campus you're at.

I am so glad you are here with us today. Holy Spirit, we just invite you in. Would You come and do, in us, that which we cannot do on our own? Would You lead our hearts to respond to You? You see, today is a special day because today we are wrapping up our Hope Carrier Initiative series. While it's the end of a series, it's the beginning of a lifestyle. For the past five months, we've been in the Hope Carrier Initiative. After years of praying, and preparing, and planning, and waiting on God, the time had come and we released it and we went for it and we've been walking it out together.

We said right from the beginning that this is a series, this is a season to remind you that you were created for more. To remind you that you've been called to dream with God. We said, right from the beginning, that we weren't going to answer all the questions you had. No, this was designed to create questions, to stir up your faith, to kind of bring you to the end of yourself a little bit, to have this sense of a discontent with the status quo. We said, right in the beginning, that we hope that what we talk about in this series gets into the very fabric and fiber of who we are as a people. That it becomes part of our ethos and our DNA and the character and the foundation of who we are as a people. We said that all we're going to do in this series is just act like God is real. Like He's here. Like He's good. Just act like His kingdom has come and more of it is coming.

I think that's what we've been doing. I want to say to you that this is, personally, my favorite series that we've ever done. Of all the series we've ever done, that I've ever had the privilege of preaching, this was my favorite, and it was, personally, the most impactful to me. Like over these last five months, the work that God did in my own soul was tremendous through this series. I have enjoyed and loved and I am grateful for this series more than any other that we have done. I want to say to you, thank you. Thank you for letting me be a part of that. Thank you for being a church that says, "We want to go where God is going and we want to move where God is moving and we're not stuck in the past, we want to move into the future with God." Because of that, my life gets to be changed because you're willing to say, "I want to go where God wants to go."

I'm grateful for that. I've been praying that in some way, shape, or form, that's true of you. See, do you remember when Jesus teaches us the Parable of the Soils? He talks about how the kingdom of God is like a farmer who goes out and sows his seed and some of it falls on hard ground and it gets snatched away. Some of it falls on rocky ground and it quickly springs up and blooms, but because it doesn't have root, it quickly withers and dies. Some falls among the thorns and thistles, it grows up, but it gets choked out and never becomes fruitful. But some falls on good soil and produces a 30, 60, hundredfold return. I've been praying that in this series – you see, I don't see this series as a lot of little seeds. I'll say it to you like this. I see it as

one big seed. I've been praying that that one big seed has landed on fertile soil in your heart and that it will produce a 30, 60, hundredfold return in the days to come.

You see, I love the direction that we're going and I love what God is doing. We are a movement of hope for the city and beyond. A movement of Jesus-focused, Spirit-filled, life-giving people, a community of faith, the body of Christ, a family on mission, a movement of hope. Hope is not an emotion or wishful thinking. Hope is a person and His name is Jesus. Jesus' main message was, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." In other words, "Change your mind, hope is here." Our hope is found in nothing except the gospel of the kingdom, where He has restored our identity, reconciled our relationship, and redeemed our purpose. A movement of hope for the city and beyond – hope carriers. You are God's answer to the world's cry. You are God's answer to the world's pain.

This is who we are and this is where we're going. You see, a hope carrier is simply a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change their world. A disciple – a learner, a follower, a student, one who becomes like the one that they follow. Someone who is practicing the way of Jesus, doing the things that Jesus did, the way Jesus did them, and where He did them, and how He did them. It's someone who says, "Jesus, You're my teacher. Everything You say is right." Living on mission to seek and save that which was lost. Not just who was lost, that which was lost. Which is all things, partnering with what God is doing in the here and now. To change their world – not "the world," not somewhere out there, but my world right here, in the here and now. Not the then and there, but my world right here, right now.

But before I can change my world, I have to be a disciple, because the kingdom only flows through a surrendered will. You can only release the kingdom that's inside of you. Kingdom within you will become the kingdom around you. All of this, just so you're clear, is just a different wrapper for that. We're just trying to lift your head up a little bit to help you see a part of it that we tend to never see. You see, the kingdom of God is a movement of hope. God wants His kingdom in every area of life. The kingdom and the church are not the same thing. The church is a part of the kingdom, but God wants His kingdom in family and education and healthcare and business and government and arts and media and sports and technology, the places you and I go every single day. The kingdom of God is simply the rule and reign of God. It's where things are submitted and surrendered to the lordship of Jesus.

It's the range of his effective will. It's what God is doing. It's God's activity. The church is the people of God, united by the Spirit of God, under the lordship of Jesus, sent to change the world. This is why Jesus says, "When you pray, pray, 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth'" – not just the church, the earth – "'as it is in heaven.'" This is why it tells us that Jesus came to destroy the works of darkness. Where do they need to be destroyed? Yes, inside of us, but also in every area of life that you and I go. Jesus says, "As the father has sent Me, so I send you." We're sent the same way that Jesus was, to do the things He did, the way He did them, but also where He did them. Where did Jesus do His works? In homes, among families; in the

synagogue, the education center of the day; in the lives of sick people, in the marketplace, in both the Jewish and Roman government.

He was the greatest storyteller that ever lived. He played with children; sports. He walked among the Roman road, the greatest technological advance of the day, and He took 12 men and he turned them into the church. We're sent into those same spaces to do the same things that He did. In fact, the very first thing that God says to humanity is, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it using all its vast resources in the service of God and man." Be fruitful – live a life of productive beauty. "I've given you a garden to steward. Steward it with excellence." Multiply – reproduce the life of God in you and to the world around you, and fill the earth, or your area of influence, with the knowledge of the glory of the goodness of God. Subdue things – bring order to chaos. Bring love to hate. Bring hope to despair. "I've sent you out like lambs among wolves with the opposite spirit. Step out of yourself, and go and subdue things with the power and the authority that I've given you. Use all of your resources to accomplish My purposes in the lives of men."

Jesus echoes that. When the resurrected Jesus is ascending to heaven, and He says, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given unto Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations." If Jesus has all authority, then darkness has none. The giants in all the areas of life, they have no authority. Jesus has been given say over all things and He now gives us that say, to make disciples of all nations, ethnos, people groups. When we think nations, we think countries. Yes, countries; but ethnos is also generations and it is also the areas of life you and I go every single day. He's actually empowered us to disciple nations, generations, and the areas of life you and I go every single day.

Most of us don't feel like we have the authority to go to nations. Most of us are disoriented by generations, but you can go into the areas of life that you go every single day and change your world. See, contained within the kingdom of heaven are all the answers to all the world's problems. Every problem the world has – sickness, disease, poverty, brokenness, despair, darkness; the answer to those things are in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is in you. That means when you walk into these spaces and places that you go every single day, the moment you walk in, heaven just walked in with you. Therefore, hope just walked in the door. Therefore, all the solutions to all the world's problems are literally living inside of you just waiting to be released. This is what it means to be a hope carrier.

It means I go into my garden and instead of complaining about it, I realize I'm here to change it. Instead of hating the work that God has given to me, I go in with a sense of purpose and destiny and dreaming that the answers to the problems right in front of me are not out there, they're right here. This is why we've been saying hope leads. Because it doesn't matter what your title is, what your position is, how much experience you have. Whoever has the most hope in any given situation is the de facto leader. You can't say, "I don't have the authority to change these spaces." No, no, no, the just question is, did you walk in with any hope today? Because if

you walked in with some hope, you become the influencing agent in those spaces. You're like salt, light, and leaven, meant to bring taste to a flavorless world, light to the darkness around you. Leaven, you're created to be in all these spaces to make all things rise to the purpose and destiny that God has in store for the world.

Come on, just think of who we have sitting next to you right now. Moms, dads, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, teachers, students, administrators, superintendents, doctors, nurses, technicians, counselors, therapists, CEOs, and vice presidents, and managers, and entrepreneurs, and consultants, and employees, mayors, council people, first responders, postal workers. We have musicians, and artists, and social media influencers, and newscasters. We have professional athletes, student athletes, coaches, trainers. We have coders, and technicians, and innovators. The question is just, do we walk into those spaces with any semblance of a theology of hope? Where are you? What's your garden? Where has God placed you in this space? Did you ever just stop and ask yourself a question, "Why am I there?"

Why has God given me these gifts, this talent, this place, this time? Maybe it's for such a time as this. Maybe you could lift up your head and realize that God has put me there because He believes in me, and He has empowered me, and He has commissioned me, and He is waiting on me to step into who He has created and called me to be. Talk about gratitude. God, thank You that You have given every one of us at least two gardens, but You've given many of us multiple gardens to steward and tend, and turn into excellence in Jesus' name. The reason all this matters is because you carry your theology with you into your daily life. It's not a 1-hour-a-week reality, it's 168 hours of your life, and whatever your theology is, what you believe, you will act as if it were so.

Atheists who don't believe in God, make no mistake about it, they carry that theology where they go. "If there is no God, then I'm in control and I've got to make it happen and there's no one to ask for help." Agnostics, people who don't believe in anything, well they carry that theology where they go. "Why bother, who cares, it doesn't matter anyways." Religious people, well they carry that theology where they go, they strive, perform, earn and they become judgmental, thinking they're the world's policemen, telling everyone what is right and wrong and good and bad. Selfish people, they carry their selfishness into these spaces and they think it's all about their good and their glory. Disciples carry their theology into all these places, because they believe they've been given power and authority by Jesus Himself to see His kingdom come and His will be done on this earth, in this time, in this garden, in this place, in the here and now.

Half of what I've just been trying to do in this series is lift up your chin. You're created for more. You're created for so much more than coming to a church gathering and going back and living like the world. You are in this world; but boy, you are of the kingdom. You have been given the power, the ability, and the authority, the right to change these places and spaces you go every single day. There's one verse that I've been saving all along the way. In Revelation, when this

age ends, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and He shall reign forever and ever!"

The kingdoms of this world – every area of life, every nation, every generation, every individual, every king and queen, eventually their kingdoms will become the kingdoms of Jesus. He will reign, be King, have highest influence. The only question is, will they do it voluntarily or will they wait until they're forced? The Bible tells us that in the end, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. I've tried to teach you in this series that kings rule by their words and their actions. Whatever responds to a king's words and his actions is within his domain, within his kingdom. Whatever rejects his words and his actions is outside of his kingdom. At some point, every tongue will confess words and every knee will bow, action that Jesus is Lord. At some point, every area of life and every person's kingdom will be submitted and surrendered to Jesus.

The only question is, are you willing to do it voluntarily or are you going to wait until it's done by force? The question that I want to ask you is, has your kingdom become His kingdom? Have you submitted and surrendered your kingdom, your free will, your ruling and reigning to the lordship of Jesus in the here and now by confessing and knowing that He is king? I want Him to be the King of my life and I want to live in His kingdom because I don't want to be king anymore. Once I decide I don't want to be king anymore and He's my King, now I can go back into these spaces and I can go rule and reign with Him, commissioned by Him to bring His kingdom into the world around me. Here's what I want to invite you to do. You grab your Hope Carrier Journal with me, your Hope Carrier Field Journal.

Hopefully, you still have it. If you don't have it, grab something else to write down with. I think those journals have been amazing. I sat and read my entire journal cover to cover last night, just going back through how grateful I am for this journey. There are three questions that I want to ask you, and just give you a moment to respond to. The first is just simply this, what has God been saying to you? Throughout this series, over the last five months, whether this is your first time here, you've come sporadically, or you've been at it all, just, "What's God been saying to you?" He's been speaking. He's been moving. "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Holy Spirit is your counselor. He's been counseling you. Just come on, what's God been saying to you? Just between you and Jesus, What's God been saying to you?

The second question is like it, but it's different. "What has God been doing in you?" He's been speaking, but He's also been working. Like a potter, He's taken you like clay and He's been shaping, forming, molding you. What's He been exposing, bringing to the surface? What's He been convicting you of or freeing you from? What's the work that God has been doing in you? Sometimes it just takes a moment to slow down, to realize that He's been speaking and working all along. The last question is, "How do you need to respond to what God has been

saying and doing?" Because, make no mistake about it, when God speaks and when God works, it demands a response.

What's the next step you need to take? What is a movement of obedience you need to grab? Maybe it's just one little thing, but we don't want to be hearers of the Word. We want to be doers of the Word. "Blessed are those who hear and obey." How do you need to respond? Because whether you realize it or not, this series has been a missional move.

If you've been in our church for a while, you know what that means. A missional move is when we take a next step for the sole purpose to create space so someone else can take the next step. It's when we move forward in faith and respond to what God is doing, so that other people can move forward. Usually, at the end of a missional move, there's an opportunity to make a commitment through giving, through serving, through leading. This is Missional Move: Hope Carrier. How are you going to respond? How are you going to respond so this doesn't become a series that six months from now you have totally forgotten? But it becomes a part of the lifestyle of who you now are. You see, in a minute, I'm going to invite you to respond by faith to say, "I am a Hope Carrier."

This is my backpack. It's what I carry every day to work. My Bible and my messages go in here. Every one of these pins is incredibly significant to me because what all of these are is these are markerstone moments of our church. When we've moved forward by faith and followed God into something significant and it became a markerstone of something we never want to forget. What we do is, as every one of our staff, when one of those things happen, we give them one of these pins. Think of like, a mountain climber. When they climb a great mountain, they get a patch on their coat to remember the expedition. Expedition: Antarctica. Or we climbed Denali. Or we conquered Everest. There's this sense of like, don't forget what that journey was like and what happened on that mountain and what we learned along the way.

Well, that's what these are to our staff family. This one is 10-10-10, when our founding pastor moved to China and I stepped in as the lead pastor in a whole new era of Valley Creek started. This one is Missional Move: Acts 1:8 where we expanded our Flower Mound campus and started our Denton campus, became multi-site for the first time and started a ministry school in India. This one is when we discovered The Three Circles, the gospel, that we are beloved sons and daughters, that He has invited us to live in that freedom. This one is Missional Move: Breakthrough, where we launched our Lewisville campus, our Next Step Center, and our Venue campus. This one is when God gave us a new vision, "To be a movement of hope for the city and beyond," because it used to be, "To help people take next steps on their journey with Jesus," and then God said, "I have more for you." This one is when we started VCLA, our Valley Creek Leadership Academy.

This one is when we launched our Gainesville campus in the middle of a global pandemic. This is when God provided and gave us the Online campus. This is when we came back after not

meeting for eight months; not meeting physically for eight months as a church. 10-10-20, Embrace the Unknown. A whole new era of church was born, and we said, "Jesus, we will go with You into the unknown." This one is a multiplier. When you reproduce your life in someone else and they step up and take a massive leadership role, this is a multiplier pin. This one, Hope Carriers. This is the one we're going to invite you to take in a moment, to invite you into this journey to say, you took this by faith. See, everything around here that you enjoy, you either took it by faith or you enjoy it by sight. There's no in-between. You either took it by faith or someone else took it by faith and you now enjoy it by sight.

But either way, we have a responsibility to steward it. But here's what I want to say to you. Most of you, most of what you experience around here, someone else took by faith, you're enjoying by sight. But you just now took hope carriers by faith. This is now yours. No one can take it away from you. In the Old Testament, God would constantly tell them to build markerstones, and He would say, "When your children look at those stones, and say, 'What is that?' Tell them what the Lord did. Remember who God was, and what He has done." My hope is that this little pin, wherever you take it, if it ends up in a treasure drawer, a junk drawer, wherever, when you see it, it reminds you of what God did and said in this season, and the theology that you discovered, and the reality that you experienced, and the new life that was open for you. When your children ask you, you can say, "Let me tell you about how God has created us."

"Let me tell you about why we're here." "Let me tell you that I don't hate my job." "No, no, I go with a purpose every single day." "Let me tell you I was created to dream with God." "Let me tell you I live under an open heaven in Jesus' name." "Let me tell you that the life of God in me is light to the world around me." "Let me tell you that when I walk into a space, I don't expect it to influence me because I'm there to influence it." "Let me tell you who I am. I'm a disciple of Jesus living on mission to change my world." Expedition: Hope Carrier. It's not the end, it's the beginning. But before you can be a hope carrier, you have to have hope inside of you.

Right now at all of our campuses, our teams are going to start passing out communion, because communion is the reminder that we have access to living hope. Jesus is that living hope and I have to have Jesus before I can be a hope carrier. Because if I don't have living hope, I have nothing to carry. When communion gets to you, it's simply a cracker and a grape juice, but it represents so much more than that. It says, "Jesus, You're the king of my kingdom." Can I just ask some of you this question? Are you saved? Like, are you confident? Do you know that you know that you're saved? That you've put your faith in Jesus? That you've confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead?

Like, have you ever repented and entered into His kingdom? Because if not, today's the day. When that gets to you, you say, "Jesus, I submit and surrender my kingdom to you. I take your broken body and your shed blood. By faith, I believe I have a new identity and a new

relationship and a new purpose that the good news of the kingdom has now come to me. It is available and accessible. When I grab these, I'm stepping in with everything that I've got. Today is the day of salvation." "For if, by the trespass of the one man, Adam, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." Death was king.

It had the ultimate influence, the ultimate authority and the ultimate say, but then Jesus came. Now, through His abundant provision of grace, undeserved favor, and supernatural empowerment, and the gift of righteousness, God's goodness, His character, His life, that me and God are now good. We now reign in life. You reign in life. Everybody say it with me. "I reign in life through Jesus." That means He is King and He has the ultimate influence over your life, but you rule and reign with Him. You are no longer under the influence of darkness and brokenness and sin and lostness, because you've entered the kingdom through the abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness.

You see, in some way, what communion is, is it's Jesus commissioning us. It's Him saying, "When you do this, this is not about remembering you, this is about remembering Me." Remember the gift of righteousness and the abundant provision of grace that you now reign in this life and that living hope has now been poured inside of you and you have entered into the kingdom of God. May you live from the superior realities in a world full of broken situations and circumstances. Jesus is our living hope.

On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus gave thanks, He took the bread and He broke it. "This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Can we receive the living hope of Jesus together? In the same way, after the supper, He took the cup and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant. My blood poured out for you." He says, "There's a kingdom of life, of righteousness and truth and goodness that is available to you. I entrust you with it. You are clean. You are holy. You are righteous. You are free. You are forgiven. You are my son and you are my daughter. I love you with everything that I am."

Can we receive the hope of Jesus together? Now that living hope is inside of us and brought to the surface; at every campus, we're going to invite you to come up to the front. There's a hope carrier pin there for you. If you, by faith, want to receive the commission, just say, "I receive the commission. I receive the assignment. I want to be a disciple of Jesus who lives on mission and changes my world." Then by faith, I want to invite you to just come take one. This is just about you today. Don't take one for the person that's not here. They need to take it by faith. We'll provide a way for them to do that. This is just, take one. If you give it to someone, it defeats the point. This is me saying, "This is me. I receive."

I can't take communion for you. You can only take it for yourself. You can't take a pin for someone else. You can only take it for you. I want to invite you to do that. For some of you, the

biggest deal is going to be actually having to walk to the front. Some of you have never walked past the row you sit in. It's very intentional. Why? Because it's called the step of faith. It's called stepping outside of myself. It's called, I'm not worried about what anyone else is thinking. I want to respond. Then, as our team sings this song, you can go back to your seat. Let's worship the Lord. Then I'm going to come back and commission us to pull it to close. At every campus, why don't we go ahead and stand up and you respond as you want.

You are a hope carrier in Jesus' name. You were created for so much more. I ask the Lord what He wanted to say to you today, and it's one simple thing that I feel like the Lord just wants to speak into your life, it's that He believes in you. You may not believe in God.

Or believe very much in Him, but He believes in you. If to believe something is to act as if it were so, He acts as if it were so. Because He's given you His name and His Spirit, and His kingdom, and His commissioning, and His assignment, and His world, and His body, and His breath, and His people, and His life, and His light, and His all of it, because He believes in you. Would you take your pin in your hand and maybe hold up your hands like this and I want to pray a prayer of commissioning over you. Maybe just choose to be as present as you can and receive by faith in your heart.

In Jesus' name, I commission you as a hope carrier. I pray that you would be anointed by the Spirit of the living God. I pray that you would be filled with His Spirit from the innermost to the outermost. That you would walk in the power and the character of Jesus wherever you go. That you would open up your mind to believe that He has given you power and authority in all things. I pray that you would dream with God. That you would see what can be in the midst of what is. That you would create a future that does not exist. That you would reach into heaven and bring it to this earth. That you would be able to see God's kingdom come where His will is not currently done. I pray that you would live under an open heaven and take advantage of the access and the opportunity that you have.

I pray that you would literally be of the kingdom, but in this world. That you wouldn't be influenced and drawn after and confused by the darkness around you, but you would bring life and light into every place that you go. I declare that you are a present people; unified in heart, mind, soul and strength. That wherever you are, that's where you are. You're tapping into the goodness of God and releasing it into the world around you. I pray that you will be like salt, light, and leaven. I pray that in every space you go, you will go into it with character, with servanthood, with wisdom, with creativity and excellence.

I pray that you would see things that no one else can see. That you will have divine solutions, heavenly wisdom, supernatural power flowing through your life wherever you go. I pray that the kingdom inside of you would be the kingdom of Jesus Christ. That that kingdom within you will become the kingdom around you. That you will use your kingly words and actions to bring things in your area of influence into alignment with the king's words and actions. I declare that

you will not see work as a burden; that you will not complain about it; that you will not despise it, but that you will see it as a blessing, as an assignment, as an opportunity. That you will tend your garden with excellence. That you will fight for it. That you will pick up the shield and the sword and say, "This matters in Jesus' name, and so, I fight for this garden."

It will be done with excellence. It will be done with creativity. It will be done with the character of the Lord Jesus. I pray that obedience is your success. That you won't grow weary in doing what is good. That no matter how many times and how many months and how many years you go back into that environment and it feels like it's not changing, you know you're planting and watering. That someday, somehow, God will make it grow. Even if it doesn't, you're contributing to building the Garden City with Him. You're practicing ruling and reigning forever. I pray that you will be faithful in the little so that God can entrust you with the much.

I pray that you will have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to receive anything and everything that God wants to say and do in your life. I pray for your mind, that you will literally think like God. Come on, receive that. I pray that you will literally think like God; that His thoughts will become your thoughts; that His ways will become your ways. That you will literally, just without even thinking about it, you will naturally and effortlessly do that which God desires to be done. I pray for your home and your family; that that is the primary place that you live as a hope carrier. I pray for every area of life that you go into.

In Jesus' name, we commission you. We send you. We send this group of people right now, Lord, into family. We send them into education. We send them into healthcare. We send them into business. We send them in Jesus' name, into government. We send them into arts and media. We send them into sports. We send them into technology. None of those things are secular. They're sacred because they go with the kingdom. They go with the Spirit of God. They go with the assignment from heaven that You are sending them as the answer to the world's cries, to the world's brokenness, to the world's pain. I pray, awaken us. Shake us up. Don't let us be content with the status quo. Holy Spirit, fill us to overflowing that we literally become witnesses of the life of Jesus wherever we go.

I pray that in Jesus' name, that pin in your hand becomes a markerstone moment where everything changed and your journey with Jesus and your life on this earth was never the same because His world invaded yours, because your kingdom was surrendered to His. In Jesus' name, I commission you as a hope carrier to live as a movement of hope for the city and beyond. May you see and experience His kingdom come and His will be done everywhere you go as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.