

what you believe about God, what concept you have in your brain about God, in your heart about God, is the most important thing about you.

It's going to color everything in your life.

It's going to color how you look at life, how you look at people, how you look at yourself.

And so for the next several weeks, well, for this summer,

We're going to be in a summer sermon series called Lies We Believe.

So instead of just teaching on the doctrines of God, we're taking it from the approach of counteracting, pushing back against lies we hear about, the nature and character and attributes of God.

So this summer we're going to spend on looking at God to truly know Him.

Then

Starting the third week of September, we're going to be going line by line, verse by verse, through Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, because we want to see what Jesus says about life in the kingdom, what his priorities are.

So I hope you'll join us for these and just pray that God will change us all through his word.

Well, today we're starting with the first lie.

that we must earn God's favor.

In other words, God loves me more when I'm good.

A lot of people believe that.

A lot of people think that.

So that's the first lie.

Well, we've been confronted with lies historically for hundreds and hundreds of years.

If you think back with the rise of Nazism that's still going on today and is a renewal of Nazism, believe it or not,

Back in the 1930s, anti-Semitism resulted in a sweeping national policy known as the Final Solution, right?

And that was the extermination of all Jewish people.

To accomplish this, Adolf Hitler and his propaganda master, Joseph Goebbels,

initiated a massive campaign to convince the German people that the Jews were their enemies and the Jews were the source of every problem in Germany.

They spread lies, blaming Jews for everything, including the loss of World War I.

And these outrageous lies date back, I mean back in the Middle Ages.

A lie claimed that the Jews engaged in the ritual killings of Christian children and used their blood in the unleavened bread eaten by Christians at Passover.

And so in Nazism, that old crazy lie began to surface again.

And using the Jews as a scapegoat, Hitler and his cronies

orchestrated what they called the big lie.

This theory states that no matter how big a lie is, in fact, the bigger, the better, because people will believe it if you repeat it enough.

Everyone tells small lies, Hitler reasoned, but few have the guts to tell colossal lies.

And

because a big lie is so unlikely, people will come to accept it.

And I say that to say this, that we have an enemy.

It's not him.

We have another enemy that's very real.

And he focuses on lies.

Better than that, half-truths.

And he wants to bombard you and me and the world with half-truths about God.

Scripture tells us Satan is the father of lies.

His name Devil means slanderer or accuser, and that's his job, to masquerade as an angel of light and speak lies, speak half-truths.

It was Tennyson who said that a lie that is a half-truth is the darkest of all lies.

So what does Satan want to lie about?

Satan wants to lie about the nature and the character of our God.

Satan wants to lie about you.

He wants to lie about your new nature, that you really don't have one.

You're just a sinner.

He wants to lie about your identity.

Your identity is your mistakes and your failures and past sins, not your new nature in Christ.

And so we have quite the enemy, and he works through the world system.

He works through the news and media and everything else.

to accomplish these lies.

And so in this series, Lies We Believe About God, we're going to tackle some of the most often repeated half-truths and lies, not just today's topic, but the fact that, well, God is really just an angry judge waiting to put his finger on us.

Or how about this, that God really cannot be trusted.

Or this one, that God is so loving that He cannot have any wrath.

His love drives away all wrath.

Plus many others.

See, there's false narratives about God that we hear every day.

But thankfully, the Word of God has true narratives.

Jesus taught the truth about His Heavenly Father and our Heavenly Father.

Dallas Willard, who's gone to be with the Lord, the great preacher, scholar, commentator, and writer, and philosopher, says this, the process of spiritual foundation and formation in Christ is one of progressively replacing, replacing what?

Destructive images and ideas

Replace them with what?

With the images and ideas that fill the mind of Jesus Himself.

So today we're starting with the biggest lie of all.

We've got to earn God's favor.

When we're gooder, He's going to love us more.

It's just natural, right?

Today, as we start with this biggest lie of all, we're going to look at a story that Jesus told to set you and me straight.

And I want you to listen to this story with an open mind like you've never heard it before, and I'm sure you have.

It's going to teach us something about the character of God.

So if you have your scriptures, open them up or turn them on to Matthew 20.

We're going to look at verses 1 through 16.

And this is the famous parable of the workers, the parable of the laborers.

And I'm going to read through this, and then we're going to expound on it and analyze it.

Verse one, for the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner.

Now in this parable, the landowner refers, stands for God, right?

Refers to God, who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.

He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and set them into his vineyard.

About the third hour, he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

He told them, you also go work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever's right.

So they went.

He went out again about the 6th hour and the 9th hour and did the same thing.

About the 11th hour, he went out and found still others standing around.

He asked him, why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?

Because nobody's hired us.

He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard.

So when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers and pay

them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

verse 9 says, the workers who were hired about the 11th hour came, and each received a denarius.

So think about 5 P.m., they've done nothing all day long.

5 P.m., they got a little bit of work in, and they were paid a denarius.

What's that?

The customary pay for a full day's work.

Verse 10.

So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more.

But each one of them also received a denarius, one denarius.

When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

These men who were hired last worked only one hour, they said, and you have made them equal to us.

Man, those are some words you need to underline.

That's an attitude that some Christians have.

God, you've made that sinner equal to me in your love or your blessings.

equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.

Verse 13.

But he answered one of them, friend, am I not being unfair to you?

Didn't you agree to work for Denarius?

Take your pay and go.

I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?

Again, who's the landowner in this story?

God.

Who owns your money?

God.

Or are you envious?

Because I'm so generous.

Verse 16.

So the last will be first and the first will be last.

So this story by Jesus wasn't just an unfamiliar made-up parable.

It was what was happening in that day and time.

As many as 18,000 men, I read, were out of work daily in Jerusalem.

And each morning they would go to the fields

and stand around and wait for the foreman to hire them to do something out in the agricultural industry.

And if they weren't hired, they would migrate to the marketplace and they would sit around and they would talk about how they hadn't been hired.

In September, earlier in September, I'm going to be going back to South Africa and then Zambia.

flying up north to Zambia to visit the New Day Orphanage.

Why the New Day Orphanage?

Because good friends of ours, former IMB missionaries, two couples, started an orphanage about 15 years ago in rural Zambia to rescue some of these orphans.

Because if you remember way back when with the AIDS pandemic, Zambia was hit the most.

And I remember the first time I went there, it would be driving down the road and there would be cemeteries with these little tiny graves of children who'd gotten AIDS from their mom or their dad or something like that.

Anyway, it wiped out a lot of adults, so there's a lot of orphans in Zambia at that time.

So this orphanage was started.

And we've partnered with it for a long time.

I'm one of the board members there and God is doing some great things.

It's newdayorphanage.org, newdayorphanage.org.

And yeah, I'm promoting it because they're doing great things.

And I was just looking at a post this morning and they have kids for like career day and they're holding up a sign like I want to be a doctor, I want to be a nurse, I want to go in the military, you know, and it's just beautiful.

at the New Day Orphanage, when I've been there, the thing would be, okay, early morning, you gather in this circle area and you have your little devotion and your prayer time.

This is before school starts for the kids.

And then after that, just brief little service of 20 or 30 minutes,

The kids go to school, actually they eat breakfast, and then they go to school, and then people from the community come in.

And these guys come in, and some ladies, and they line up.

And there might be 10 of them or 12 of them, and they're just waiting for their daily work.

And so we would say, okay, I need three guys to go hoe that field.

I need three guys to cut down the grass over there.

with your sickle.

And so you would give day work.

They were day workers.

That's what was going on here.

Well, the landowner hires some men at 6 A.m., some at 9 A.m., more at noon, more at 3 P.m., and finally a few at 5 P.m.

And so these early workers are stunned when they receive the same pay as those that just worked at an hour starting at 5 P.m.

So this story is going to show us two truths, like one bad one, one good one, right?

Here's the first truth.

Your default and mind, your default mindset and mind will be that you have to earn your way to

heaven.

Now, you good Christians, you know this is not the truth, right?

You've been trained in good biblical.

You know what the gospel is, but I'm saying everybody's born with this mindset of you got to be good enough.

You got to earn your way to heaven.

Look at verse 2.

The workers were okay with working all day long for the customary pay.

One denarius.

One denarius coin.

That made sense to them.

You work for your pay.

But verse 11, look at that.

What didn't make sense to them, what infuriated them, was the fact that these lazy latecomers who didn't work as hard or long as they did, they got the same pay.

The time clock and the payslip didn't match.

These loafers hadn't earned the reward of the denarius coin.

We see commentators will tell us that there was a similar story going around in Jesus' day taught by rabbis.

Jesus didn't have to invent this story.

This story was going around, but it had a different ending.

In the story that was going around, the punchline was different.

The punchline matches our mindset of earning what we get.

In that story in Jesus' day that was circulating, the landowner responds to the complaining early workers who had worked hard all day long, saying that this last group got paid the same because actually they worked harder in their one, two, or three hours than the other workers did all day.

I like that better, don't you?

I really do.

That fits my personality and my work ethic and everything.

I like that.

That's the one that was going around.

Jesus turned it on its end.

Why?

Because he's talking about God here.

He's giving us some doctrine here.

James Bryan Smith, who wrote the book, *The Good and Beautiful God*, and it's a great supplemental resource for this whole rest of the summer, *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith, he says this.

From a young age, we learn that our parents' love is dependent on our good behavior, that school grades are given based on our performance, and that affection is offered if we're attractive enough, especially for, unfortunately, for girls.

He goes on to say, when every person, in every situation, in every day of our lives,

treats us on the basis of how we look, how we act, and how we perform, it's not difficult to project that onto God.

Boom.

We do it, don't we?

So the conclusion is that God will accept us if we're good enough, if we work hard enough.

Dr.

Henry Cloud says that if you walk into a church,

any given church on a Sunday, you have to hear a message that goes like this, God is good, you are bad, try harder.

Have you ever heard that before?

Maybe not in those literal words, but that's the attitude, that's the vibe you get.

God is good, you're bad, so you better try harder.

Well, there's a second truth, and I pray

that this one displaces that first truth about the mindset that you're born with, the truth of working for God's favor.

And this truth is that God's system of favor is based on undeserved grace.

This is huge.

This is what separates your religion from Islam.

This is what separates your faith from the faith of Buddhism.

from the faith of Mormonism, of Jehovah's Witnesses.

This is what separates us.

It's that God has come to us and offered undeserved, unmerited favor through Jesus.

He did something that we can't do.

He gets all the credit for it.

We don't.

Verse one, if you go back there to our story, for the kingdom of heaven is alike.

Jesus was saying, this is the way it works in heaven.

This is how my father does business.

Now to the workers and to us, the landowner's actions were not logical.

His right should have been proportional to how much work was done.

And the initial workers in the early morning wanted a contract.

Look at verse 2.

He agreed.

It was like a contract.

We want a contract.

God, if I do my part, you're going to do your part, right?

If I'm good enough, if I overcome my signature sins, my pet bad behaviors or thoughts,

Those words slip into my vocabulary sometimes.

If I do all that and if I start serving you more, God, you're going to do your part.

You're going to bless me more, right?

I'm going to have more of your favor.

In fact, you're going to love me more.

That's the way our brain works.

If you think that you can be good, do good stuff, do religious things,

and earn the wage of heaven, listen to what the Bible says about what your wages should be.

Romans 6:23, can somebody quote that?

For the wages of sin is death.

Church, that means hell.

The wage, that's what your wage should, that's what we deserve in our original state of rebellion.

You're born in rebellion against God.

You're born with a dead spirit.

And in our original state, that is our wage.

That's what we deserve, you and me.

Is judgment and hell.

It's our default destination.

Why?

Because one sin would ruin heaven.

If heaven is truly a place that's sinless and perfect, where we are free not just from the penalty of sin, hell, the power of sin through temptation on life on earth now, but even the presence of sin, right?

One sin would ruin all of that.

Sin is a deal breaker for a sinless God.

And so God says that even in our best,

Compared to Him, we're like filthy rags.

It's our pride.

And God just can't let it go because it would mean that He's no longer righteous and just and holy.

There's got to be a penalty and a payment for sin.

And you see, that's what Jesus did.

And that is the gospel, right?

With the gospel, sin becomes a really big deal.

You can't just blow it off and

sound better than them.

With the true gospel of Christ, sin is a big deal, but God's saving grace and love becomes a bigger deal.

God solved our problem.

you cannot earn God's love.

You cannot earn God's favor.

You cannot be good enough to get to heaven.

You cannot depend on both faith and works for your salvation.

I know some people, well-meaning people, and they would say, I believe in Jesus.

I love Jesus.

But I also have to carry out these religious practices.

I worship Jesus, but I also have to do the sacraments.

See, it's Jesus plus.

I know a lot of people, it's Jesus plus.

Oh, I believe Jesus, He's the Savior.

I pray to Him, but I got to do my part.

Well, listen, when it's Jesus plus religion, what does that say about Jesus?

He's insufficient.

His merit, what He did on the cross, was not good enough.

It wasn't 100%.

So you've got to add 30% to it.

Jesus plus religion is not Christianity.

The gospel should drive away the biggest lie of all.

God only loves me when I am good.

It drives it away.

So what does God want from you?

Well, Jesus was asked, what's the greatest commandment?

And what was his answer?

It's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

It wasn't to perform.

It wasn't to do something and check it off the list.

See, God wants you to know Him and love Him.

And when you do that, you're going to have a tendency to start obeying Him more when you really get to know Him.

And that's why we're spending time on His attributes this summer, when you really get to know Him.

You're going to fall in love with Him, I promise you.

And you're going to gradually want to obey Him more.

That's what sanctification is, yes?

Becoming more like Christ.

Or you decide, I'm going to fight against that sin in my life.

I'm going to struggle against it because that's not me.

I don't want that in my life.

Well, A.W.

Tozer, the great pastor and devotional writer, he died back in 1963.

Here's what he says.

What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

From that we can predict with certainty the spiritual future of a person.

It's what you think about God.

It's your attitude toward God and who He is.

What you think about God and what you believe in God is, well, it will affect everything in your life.

And what you believe, if you believe a half-truth,

If you believe the big lie, and there's many of them, that could do me forever.

I love that scripture makes it clear about the love of our God.

I was just reading this not too many weeks ago to your mother, right?

Romans 8, who should separate us from the love of God?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword, as it is written for your sake, we face death all day long and we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered?

See, troubles are not the litmus test of how much God loves you.

We all do know that, right?

That's what immature baby Christians think.

Things going bad for me, I must have done something wrong.

Where's the love of God?

It's my fault.

I've done something wrong.

Circumstances cannot accurately reflect God's love for you.

They never can.

Some of the greatest saints in the world had suffered mightily.

It's this lie of if things go well for me, God loves me.

He's loving me the most.

When things go bad, God is loving me a little bit less.

I spoke, I don't know, a week or two ago about the difference between being a thermometer
and a thermostat.

Yes, you remember that?

And I've decided in my life I am not going to be a thermometer that just reflects culture and society
and goes up and down.

I want to be a thermostat.

I want to be someone that can follow God, see where God's at work, join Him, and set the spiritual
temperature.

I want to do that in my life.

there's another analogy too when we talk about that.

If the thermostat goes up two degrees, the temperature goes up two degrees.

And my point here is that with many people, here's their reasoning, and it's faulty.

If I'm good 2% more, God will love me 2% more.

Have you ever thought that in the deep recesses, the crevices of your mind or spirit?

I bet you have.

You're walking with the Lord.

You're sharing your faith.

You started tithing, all of this.

I bet God loves me a little bit more.

He doesn't.

Our God is a God of agape, undeserving love.

And there's nothing that can separate us from that.

So I want you to think this morning as we start off this series,

What is your view of God and your performance or lack of it?

And is there any way in your life that you really have, you have faith in Jesus, but it's Jesus plus?

I want you to come before the Lord.

I want you to get rid of any of that is a half-truth from the enemy because he wants you to live in that.

because it's not a good life wondering, have I measured up enough?

Could God love me more if I hadn't done this in my past eight months ago or eight years ago?

I don't want you to live that way.

Jesus has done it all for you and me.

Let me share this story that I came across, I don't know, a little bit ago.

Author and speaker Brennan Manning

has an amazing story about how he got the name Brennan.

Okay, so his story says, well, growing up, he had a best friend.

His best friend's name was Ray.

And the two of them did everything together.

I mean, they went to elementary school together, junior high together, high school together.

They pitched in and bought a car together when they were old enough to drive.

They double dated.

They did it all.

Then they both decided they would go into the army.

They did it together.

They went to boot camp together.

And then they weren't, they went, and this was back in the days of World War II, they went to the battlefield together.

And one night while sitting in a foxhole, Brennan was reminiscing about the old days in Brooklyn, that's where they both grew up, and Ray, his best friend, listened and was eating a chocolate bar.

And suddenly, and this is a true story, suddenly a live grenade was thrown into the foxhole.

Ray looked at Brennan, smiled at him, threw down his chocolate bar, and threw himself on the live grenade, and it exploded, of course, killing Ray.

But Brennan's life was spared.

So you fast forward, and Brennan Manning becomes a priest.

And he was instructed to take on the name of a saint.

And he thought of his best friend, Ray Brennan.

So he took on that name, Brennan, his friend's last name, to be his first name.

So he's Brennan Manning.

And years later, he went to visit Ray's mom back in Brooklyn.

So he went home.

And they sat up late one night having tea when Brennan asked her,

So tell me, what did your son really think of me?

Did he really love me?

And that set her off.

Mrs.

Brennan got up off the couch, shook her finger in front of Brennan's face and shouted, and she probably didn't do it the right way, but she said, Jesus Christ, what more could he have done for you?

And she didn't mean it the way that you and I would think.

Brennan said at that moment, he was shocked.

in this rebuke by Ray's mom.

And it just came to him.

He imagined himself standing before the cross of Jesus when Jesus was being crucified, wondering, I saw this going on, but does God really love me?

And he had this vision of Jesus's mother, Mary, who was there, as you know the story, pointing up the cross to her son and saying, Jesus,

What more could he have done for you?

So I want you to take some moments this week and reflect on this.

Just slow down, ask God to speak and meditate on the following scriptures and say, what does it say about God?

What does it say about me?

Here's the first one, Romans 5, 8.

Some of you can quote it, memory verse.

But God demonstrates his own love towards us and while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us.

We were ornery, we were messed up, we didn't care.

And Christ died for us.

Second one, 1 John 4.10, this is love.

Not that we love God, but that He loved us and He sent His Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

I want you to think about those verses this week.

And because of those verses, I want you to have this new perspective of God that you can't buy His

love, you can't earn His love,

You can't do better, so he'll love you better.

I want you to just bask in the unconditional love of your heavenly Father and how he proved it through Jesus, because in the end, that's it, right?

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is God's way of answering our question, God, do you really love me?

God, am I important to you?

The message of the whole Bible is, what more

Could he have done for you to prove that?

you don't have to earn His love.

So let's stop believing half-truths, yes?

And let's believe what the Bible says, what Jesus says about His Heavenly Father and what He tried to show us through this parable of the workers.

And I would say this, if you look at your life and you go, Lord, that's true, that's me.

I've been believing in Jesus plus.

Jesus plus me going to church.

Jesus plus me being good enough.

God, that's not truth.

God, forgive me of that.

And Jesus, I am trusting in you alone for my salvation from this point on.

Not you and me, you alone for my salvation.