

Thinking Clearly
Three Little Lies
June 4, 2017

ANNOUNCEMENT VIDEO
Congregational Songs – From the Day /
Rejoice
Video – “NHCC Behind the Scenes”

Feature – “Unpack Your Heart” / Offering

Let's pray together.

God, so many of us this morning are suffering from a heart that is down and burdened because of the lies we believe; lies about You, lies about ourselves, and lies about life in this world. So, I pray that as I speak today, your Holy

Spirit would use my words to enlighten us to the truth and set us free.

I know that's what Jesus wants for all of us, I ask for this in His name. Amen.

Good morning everyone.

As Shannon said, we're beginning a new series called "Thinking Clearly" and today's message is called "Three Little Lies." I should probably say right up front that I may have mistitled this because the three lies we're going to talk about this morning are not – in any sense of the word – "little."

Instead, they're *huge* falsehoods with potentially life-changing negative impact. The longer you and I believe them and live our lives according to their guidance, the more likely it is we're going to fall far short of the quality of life that God has intended for us to experience.

Jesus once said "I have come that people might have life and have it to the full." Never forget that's the goal. Never forget that is what God desires for you and hopes for you.

But these lies wage war against that goal. I've experienced it myself and

I've seen it happen again and again to others.

So, when I say these lies are “little” I don't mean it in relation to their potential impact. I call them “little” because of the fact that they are typically well-hidden deep in our subconscious thinking. They don't speak very boldly or loudly. Very rarely do they appear in the forefront of our minds.

Instead, they're like a faucet that hasn't been shut off completely and so there is a slow but steady drip. That drip – each tiny drop of water – doesn't appear to be a big thing all by itself. But the persistence of that

little leak will eventually wind up extracting a huge cost over time ... unless ... someone discovers it and turns it off.

And that's my goal today. I want to help you discover those little leaks in the back of your mind that may be extracting a huge cost in terms of the kind of life you are living today (or will be living in the future) if you don't turn them off.

Now, having said that, I should also say that there are many more than three "little lies" that can have a devastating impact on our lives. But, in the interest of time, I've chosen to limit myself to the three I

think are the most prevalent among Christians (people who believe in Jesus as their savior from sin and are trying to follow His teachings).

The three lies are ...

- The Identity Lie
- The Happiness Lie
- The Circumstances Lie

Identity, happiness, circumstances; three really big issues for all of us.

So, are you ready? Here we go.

The Identity Lie

The first lie – the identity lie – is

one with which I am personally and intimately acquainted. In fact, I had no idea of just how much power this one had over me until seven years ago when I was at the point of burnout as a pastor.

What's odd is that *I myself didn't realize that's where I was at*. But others did. So they got together and arranged for me and Jetta to go off to a weeklong retreat specifically designed for pastors and spouses.

And that's where I began to learn about this particular lie and discovered the impact it was having on me. Perhaps it's impacting you as well.

Here it is ...

**The Identity Lie: “I am what I do ...
what I have ... and what people think of
me.” <repeat>**

The Identity Lie tells me that my identity is rooted in my accomplishments, my belongings and my level of approval by others.

And because I believe that is true ...

- Therefore, I must perform. I must be the best at what I do ... whether it's being a pastor, parent, policeman, programmer, painter, player of online games or whatever.

Failure is unacceptable.

- I must possess and hold onto wealth, health, status, beauty, intelligence, position, friends, family or whatever else can be acquired. Loss is traumatic.
- And I must do whatever pleases “them” – family, friends, bosses, employees, clients, parishioners or people I don’t even know who exist (at least for me) only in the Twitter-verse or Facebook-land. Disapproval is death to me.

“I must perform, possess and please
... for I am what I do, what I have

and what people think of me.”

Now, you might be thinking, “why is that a lie, Rick? Are you saying that what we do doesn’t matter? That what we have been blessed with or acquired isn’t valuable? That having people think well of us is meaningless?”

Not at all. Those *are* important.

They just should not be equated with who we are. They should not be the source of our identity. And to allow them to hold that position in our thinking is a great trap and temptation ... one that Jesus Himself had to face.

Right after the story of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (as recorded in chapter three of Matthew's biography of Jesus), Matthew tells us that ...

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Matthew 4:3 (NIV)

Jesus answered, "It is

written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down.

Matthew 4:6 (NIV)

For it is written:

*“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,*

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Matthew 4:9 (NIV)

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan!

*For it is written:
‘Worship the Lord your
God, and serve him
only.’”*

*Then the devil left him,
and angels came and
attended him. Matthew
4:1-11 (NIV)*

Matthew goes on to tell us that after this time in the desert and facing these temptations, Jesus began his ministry ... which is important to note.

In fact, let’s see the timeline visually because the sequence of events in Jesus’ life at this point is significant.

- Matthew 3:13-17 ... Jesus is baptized (as a way of

acknowledging that He is called to be Messiah of Israel)

- Matthew 4:1-11 ... Jesus is tempted in the desert
- Matthew 4:12-25 ... Jesus begins preaching, appoints his disciples, begins healing people

Now, here's why that sequence matters.

At the point in his life when Jesus went into the desert, He hadn't yet done anything.

He hadn't healed anyone. He hadn't preached any sermons. He hadn't formed a team.

And so the temptation to turn

stones into bread wasn't just about solving a hunger problem. It was about proving Himself by *performing*.

I can imagine Satan saying something like, "That was a pretty big moment you had back there in the water, Jesus, with the dove coming down out of the sky and all of that. Very cool. And now you think you're the Messiah?"

"Well, you are what you do so *prove it*. Perform. Do something ... Messiah-like. Here's a thought: how about turning these stones into bread and ending your hunger? That would do it."

I think it's also important to note that when Jesus went into the desert, He had not only *done* nothing, He didn't *have* anything.

So the temptation to bow down and worship was really about *possessing*.

Again, I can imagine Satan taunting Jesus: “How can you be a King without a Kingdom? Tell you what: just sign right here. Bow down to me and it'll all be yours” (which, by the way, was Satan's right to give as the Bible tells us that he has and will have dominion over the earth until the Day of Judgment when God sets all things right).

“You are what you have, Jesus. And you have nothing. Here’s an easy way for you to come into possession of what you need.”

Finally, I think it’s significant that, at this point in His life, Jesus had not only *done* nothing and *had* nothing, there was also no one following Him.

He was basically invisible. No one even knew who He was.

So the temptation to throw himself down from the top of the temple and let the angels catch him was about *pleasing* everyone.

“You know, Jesus,” I can hear Satan

saying, “you’re nothing more than a hick from the backwoods of Nazareth. And everyone knows that ‘nothing good ever comes from there.’ So, you’d better do something dramatic that’ll get everyone’s attention and win them over from the very beginning because, after all, you are what others think of you.”

Amazing isn’t it? Just like you and me, Jesus was tempted to believe that His identity was ultimately rooted in what He did, what He had and what others thought of Him. Perform, possess and please.

Of course, we read (and we already

knew) how that all turned out: *Jesus didn't give in to Satan's temptations ...* and we'll talk about why in just a minute.

But let's pause for a bit and look a little more deeply at how the "Identity Lie" manifests itself in our lives. I don't think any of us are hearing the voice of Satan directly (at least I hope not). Instead, because it's buried deep down into the subconscious, this little lie typically presents itself in a much more subtle way. You have to look for it behind other thoughts and actions that seem fairly innocuous.

So, let's go digging, shall we? I'm

just going to read a few statements and, as I do, see if any of them apply to you.

- I hesitate to admit to others that I feel inadequate in significant areas of my life.
- I often beat myself up for not being a good enough parent, employee, boss, pastor or whatever.
- I get irritated when others don't recognize how much I've done for them and how much they need me.
- I sometimes compromise what should not be compromised in order to succeed.
- I find it hard to receive

constructive criticism and negative feedback without taking it as a personal attack.

If two or more of those apply to you, then it's quite likely you've bought into the part of the Identity Lie that says you are what you do and that your worth as a person is ultimately tied to your performance. By the way, when I first became aware of this lie, four of those statements applied to me.

Ok, let's keep digging. See how many of these statements apply.

- I regularly compare myself to other people (and I am jealous

of those “above” me and smug towards those “below” me).

- I often think about my next big purchase.
- I cannot imagine a life without all the things I have accomplished and acquired.
- I get scared and sometimes angry when my health, family, status, income, etc are threatened.
- I’m irritated whenever I hear a sermon about money and giving.

If two or more of those apply to you, then it’s quite likely you’ve bought into the part of the Identity Lie that says you are what you have

and your worth as a person is ultimately tied to your possessions.

Ok, one more set of statements. How many of these apply to you?

- I often say “yes” when I really want to say “no.”
- I will do almost anything to avoid conflict.
- I often talk about my accomplishments and knowledge.
- I get angry when other people don’t treat me like I think they should.
- I am pretending to be someone I’m not so that others will like me.

If two or more of those apply to you, then it's quite likely you've bought into the part of the Identity Lie that says you are what others think of you and that your worth as a person is ultimately tied to your ability to please people.

Now, as I said earlier, I am personally and intimately acquainted with this lie because I believed it for a long, long time. When Jetta and I went to that retreat years ago, at one point the leader said to me, "Rick, whenever a guy plants a church like you did,

that church often becomes his baby. He gets attached to its success or failure.”

And then he said something I will never forget. He said, “It seems to me that you’re living your life as if you are tied to the mast of the Good Ship North Heartland.”

And it was like, “oh my goodness. He’s right!”

- Whenever the church was up – if things were going smoothly, if “my baby” was shiny and bright, if people were happy with it and with me – then I was up.

- But whenever the church was down – if we weren’t doing well; if “my baby” was being threatened; if people were critical of it and negative towards me – then I was down.

I was constantly riding the waves.

That’s what it’s like when you buy into the Identity Lie because at any given moment ...

- What you do might not be enough ... and you might not be able to do anything at all.
- Whatever you have could be taken away from you

- People could reject you even if you do everything right

And when you have that kind of pressure in your life, you start doing all those disingenuous, self-destructive, unhealthy things I just read to you ... and more.

Fortunately, we don't have to live according to this lie. We don't have to live as if we are what we do, what we have and what people think about us ...

... which brings us back to Jesus in the desert and his ability to reject

Satan and the Identity Lie. How did He do it?

“Well, obviously, Rick, Jesus was the Son of God so *He just did it*. Like, what else *could* He do? The fix was in. He was going to overcome no matter what.”

I don't think so.

The New Testament is very clear that when God took on flesh and became a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He also laid aside all of his divine rights and powers. Whatever Jesus did, he had to do through the power of faith and trust in His Father ... just like you and

me.

The only thing Jesus had going in his favor at that point was what had happened just before the trip to the desert. Remember what that was?

It was His baptism.

So, let's look at that a bit more closely. And remember, as we do, that at this point in His life ...

- Jesus has done nothing
- Jesus has nothing
- And there is no one following Him.

There has been ...

- No Messiah-like *performance* on His part
- No *possession* of anything rightly due to a King
- And no effort to *please* anyone so they would follow Him

Now, let's read about His baptism.

As Jesus came up out of the water, suddenly the heavens were opened, and he saw God's spirit coming down like a dove and landing on him.

Then there came a voice out of the heavens. "This is my son, my beloved one," said the

voice. "I am delighted with him."

*Matthew 3:16-17
(NTE)*

Before Jesus does anything, has anything and gains even one single follower, He hears his Father say, "You are my Son. You are my beloved One."

There's been no effort on His part to perform, possess or please. And yet the Father says, "I am pleased with you. I am delighted with you."

And beginning in the desert and all through his life that was the voice He clung to ...

- When His ministry went well and then when it failed
- When he became a great public persona and then a great public pariah
- When the multitudes praised him and then rejected him; when they cried out “Hosanna” and then “Crucify him.”

All through his life – no matter what happened – he held on to the truth that “I am the beloved Son of the Father. Regardless of whether or not my ministry is successful, even though I don’t even have a place to lay my head, no matter whether anyone likes me or not,

that's who I am.”

And that's how Jesus could say no to the Identity Lie. That's how He was able to live the amazing life He lived and even die the terrible death He died. His existence was rooted and grounded in the love of the Father.

Of course, that's *Jesus'* experience. But what about you and me?

Well, if you're a Christian – one who believes in and follows Jesus – the good news is that what was true of Jesus is now true of *you* because of *Him*.

In other words, when Jesus gave his life for you on the cross, He traded places with you. He took your sin and the penalty for it and, in exchange, He gave you His identity.

The Apostle Paul explains it like this:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*2 Corinthians 5:21
(NIV)*

If you are a Christian, this means that not only are you forgiven of all

your sins. It means that in God's sight you are just like Jesus.

You, too, are a beloved son or daughter of the Father!

We sang it earlier in the service: "Rejoice! We are children of the Father, the beloved of the Lord."

What's amazing is how often the first Christians referred to themselves in that way.

If you read the letters from the very first leaders of the church to the very first Christians, they constantly address them as "the beloved" to hammer home the point

that ...

- Regardless of what they do or don't do
- Regardless of what they have or don't have
- Regardless of whether the world around them applauds them or despises them ...

... THEY ARE THE BELOVED ONES OF GOD. That's who they really are.

And that's who we really are, too, if we're Christians – if we believe in Jesus and follow Him.

So reject the Identity Lie: “I am what I do ... what I have ... and what

people think of me.” Build your life on your true identity; on the truth that you are a beloved son or daughter of the Father.

In the words of the Apostle Paul ...

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Ephesians 3:17

(NIV)

Not only do I pray that ...

- I challenge and encourage you

to regularly get around people who *do* grasp His love and can remind you of it.

- I challenge and encourage you to devote part of each Sunday to the worship and teaching of Jesus where we are reminded of that.
- And I challenge and encourage you to attempt to pray five minutes a day because that brings you into God's presence where you will be reminded of that.

All of these things will help you remain rooted and established in

God's love and will remind you that, in Christ and because of Christ, you are worthy and you matter not because of your performance, possessions or ability to please. You matter and you are worthy just because He has chosen to love you.

And that will make a huge difference in your life.

The Happiness Lie

So that's the Identity Lie. It's a huge one and probably the most destructive one which is why we spent so much time on it.

Now, let's move on and look at the other two lies which won't take nearly as long because, as we'll see, they're related to the Identity Lie.

The second lie that I see at work in me and in others which does so much damage is the Happiness Lie.

The Happiness Lie ... “Being a Christian should make me happier (and my life easier ... which would make me happy).”

In other words, “what God really wants is for me to be happy, so He will arrange my life so that happens. After all, as you said earlier, Rick, Jesus did say that He came so that we could live life to

the full. So, if I am unhappy right now or if my life is hard right now, something must be wrong with me or with God.”

If you’ve ever thought that, you’re not alone. Jesus’ first followers had the same issue.

In the fourth chapter of Mark’s biography of Jesus, we read that one evening, after a long day of teaching the multitudes who were following Him ...

Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go across to the other side of the lake.”

So after leaving the crowd, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat, and other boats were with him.

Now a great windstorm developed and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was nearly swamped. Mark 4:35-37 (NET)

And, this really freaked out the disciples. They'd seen Jesus do miracles. They'd heard His teaching. They knew who He was.

So, it was a shock to them to

discover that, sometimes, the worst storms of life happen even when Jesus is in the boat! Sometimes they happen *because* Jesus is in the boat.

Just ask any of the Christians in Syria or Iraq. Their life is actually a lot harder because of Jesus.

You see, friends, there's no promise of a magical happiness in this life for those who follow Jesus. There's no spiritual fairy dust that God sprinkles over your life that makes everything easier. You and I still live in a sin-cursed world where Satan and death still have dominion. And we ourselves, through our own sinfulness and

foolishness, add to the misery.

And because of those two realities, storms are still going to happen. And if we don't understand that ... if we believe the lie that says "being a Christian is going to make me happy and my life easier" then we're going to be constantly disappointed and disillusioned.

"OK Rick, but what does it mean when Jesus promises an abundant life - a full life - to those who believe in and follow Him?"

Great question. For the answer, we only have to look at what Jesus said at the end of what we call "The

Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew’s biography, chapters 5 through 7.

After a great and fairly long explanation of how His followers should live, Jesus says ...

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock.”

However, Jesus continues ...

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!”

*Matthew 7:24-27
(NIV)*

What Jesus is saying here is that a happy and fulfilled life is not gained just because we believe in Him. A happy and fulfilled life is gained because we *do what He says*.

In other words ...

Happiness is the by-product of obeying Jesus.

It's the cumulative effect of thousands upon thousands of little decisions over time to follow His teachings ... which means that our happiness is ultimately up to us – not to God.

Of course, some would say, “that’s obvious, Rick. That’s why people run after money and power and position and entertainment and all sorts of things.”

True. But Jesus says when you build your life on those things – when you pursue happiness directly like that

– you wind up with very little of it. Instead, when you live His way, you get happiness thrown in as a side-benefit.

Happy are those who admit their spiritual need.

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right.

Happy are those who show mercy.

Happy are those who know what sorrow means.

Happy are the gentle, the pure-hearted and the peacemakers.

Happy are those who have suffered persecution for My sake.¹

Happiness is a by-product. It's a second thing, not a first-thing. You only get it when you pursue first things.

So ...

- I challenge and encourage you to regularly get around people who are seeking to obey Jesus; who are pursuing the first things.
- I challenge and encourage you to devote part of each Sunday to the worship and teaching of Jesus where we learn about His way.

- And I challenge and encourage you to attempt to pray five minutes a day because that will align your heart with the first things.

So, that's the Happiness Lie. And a lot of Christians get tripped up by it.

The Circumstances Lie

But let's now turn our attention to the final lie ... the Circumstances Lie.

The Circumstances Lie says that "because things are bad, it must mean that God doesn't love or care about me."

- My spouse died, so God must not care.
- I lost my job, so God must not care.
- I can't get over this illness, so God must not care.
- People mistreat me, so God must not care.

And the list could go on and on of bad things that happen that we interpret to mean that God doesn't really love us. And it might not even be a thought we verbalize. It's just this little drip, drip, drip in the back of our minds that slowly poisons our heart and soul.

And if you've experienced that, you're not alone. Jesus' first followers had the same issue.

Let's go back to that story we were reading about Jesus and the disciples and the boat and the storm.

Remember, they're crossing the lake in the evening. It's getting dark and the wind comes up. It gets stronger and stronger until the waves begin crashing over the front of the boat. It gets so bad that unless something happens, it's going under.

So where do you think Jesus is as all

of this is going on?

Mark writes ...

*But he was in the stern,
sleeping on a cushion.*

All this commotion ... all this turbulence ... and Jesus is taking a power nap!

... which, quite frankly, is how it sometimes feels when we're in the middle of a storm in our lives, doesn't it? We're being tossed and rocked by bad circumstances and it seems like God is asleep in the stern!

Mark tells us that ...

They woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are about to die?”

Mark 4:38 (NLT)

Notice that their question isn’t “Jesus, are you unaware of what’s going on?” And it isn’t “Jesus, can’t you do something about this?”

Of course, Jesus is aware. Of course He can do something. Again, they’ve seen his miracles. They know who He is.

The question they ask has to do with whether or not He really loves them. “If you care for us, Jesus, how

could you let this happen? How could you let us die in this storm?”

Mark goes on to tell us that Jesus got up and spoke to the wind, and said to the sea, “Be quiet! Calm down!”

And that’s what happened. The wind stopped, and sea grew dead calm ... which was really cool for them to experience.

And it’s really cool when you and I get to experience something like that, too; when we find ourselves in a really tough spot and we cry out to God “I’m about to drown here!” And then God steps in and does

something miraculous that saves us. And we think, “whew, glad to know that He really does love and care for me.”

And He really does. But that miraculous rescue is *not* the ultimate proof.

In fact, trusting in our deliverance as the proof of God’s love is just as dangerous as believing that our bad circumstances are proof He doesn’t love us. Actually, it’s just the other side of the coin on which that lie is inscribed.

Point being, your immediate circumstances – good or bad – are never the indication of God’s

disposition towards you.

When we live as if they are, we're always on a spiritual and emotional roller coaster. If things are good, that means God loves us and we're up. If things are bad, then God must not care and we're down.

It's crazy-making!

And it's not the way God wants his children – those who are dearly beloved simply because God has chosen to love them and not because of what they do or have; that's not the way God wants us to live.

The truth about your circumstances and mine at any given moment is that they are an indeterminable combination of ...

- Chance – stuff just happens in this world, like the fact that you live here and not Uganda
- Karma – you really do reap what you sow. Your smart and dumb decisions, your good and bad choices all come back to you in some way.
- The actions of others, including people who lived a 100 or 1000 years ago.
- And, for sure, Divine Providence – the grace and mercy of God on your life.

All of those factors (and more) have produced your circumstances at any given moment. You just don't know how much weight each factor has. It's an indeterminable combination.

But that's OK because you don't need good circumstances to be happy. And you don't need good circumstances as evidence that God really loves you.

So if circumstances aren't the indication, then what is?

The Bible is very clear about this. It tells us again and again that ...

The love of God is revealed to us in Jesus who freely gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

If you want evidence that you are truly loved, that God truly cares, look not at your life or your circumstances. Look at the Cross.

God so loved the world, John wrote, that He gave his only Son.

God proves his love in this, Paul wrote, that even though we were sinners, Christ died for us.

It's the cross, not our immediate circumstances, that speaks to God's love and care for us. And it is God's love and care that promises us that

even the worst storms of this life are only temporary in the light of eternity.

This is why the Apostle Paul could say with great confidence ...

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus ... Yes, we live under constant

*danger of death because
we serve Jesus ...*

But ...

*We know that God, who
raised the Lord Jesus,
will also raise us with
Jesus.*

*That is why we never
give up. Though our
bodies are dying, our
spirits are being
renewed every day. For
our present troubles are
small and won't last
very long. Yet they
produce for us a glory
that vastly outweighs
them and will last
forever!*

So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

2 Corinthians 4: 8-11a, 14a, 16-18 (NLT)

Let's pray.

<PRAYER>

Identity lie - "I am what I do ... what I have ... and what people think of me."

Happiness lie - “Being a Christian should make me happier (and my life easier ... which would make me happy).”

Circumstance lie - “because things are bad, it must mean that God doesn't love or care about me.”

Going to close with a song ...

Congregational Song – “This I Believe”

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week ... “Thinking Clearly” continues with the message “I Do ... But Sometimes I Don’t” – are your failures

impacting your relationship
with God?

2.NHCC SUMMER CLASSES start
this week ... we are offering a
wide variety of classes. For
more info or to sign up can
check it out on-line at our
website...under Sign Me Up or
they can stop by the Info Center
table on their way out.

Endnotes

ⁱ From a great paraphrase of the Beatitudes found here:
<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3160>