

The Rev. Billy Cerveney:

Pray with me. Father, thank you for the gift of your word.

Thank you for the blessing of children.

Lord, I pray that this morning you would give us the ability to see you, to give us the ears that hear, that we may know what it means to walk with you

and to love the world in the way that you love the world. We thank you, Jesus, and we pray this in your name, amen. Amen.

How we doing today?

All right, I love it.

So I see all these backpacks. We're doing the blessing of the backpacks today, if you were unaware, but the blessing of the backpacks is something we do every year, it's one of my favorite things. Except it means one thing it means that summer is coming to a close.

You getting your last minute trips in?

I did, I've been doing that, we've been packing it in. It was a couple weeks ago, my wife and I we had our 20th wedding anniversary. We had, it was pretty cool, I was very excited. We met out in Colorado years ago, and we went to a place called Frontier Ranch, which is a young life camp. And when I was driving back to Nashville, I cut through Texas, because it was nowhere on the way home, and I took her out on a date. And when I got there, she told me, "Hey, I've got tickets to the Texas State Fair." Which I don't know if you've ever been to the Texas State Fair, but it's like a different level of fair. And they have this giant Texan with a cowboy hat called Big Tex standing at the gate, welcoming you in. But she said to me, and I will never forget, she says, "I can't wait, we are going to ride every single roller coaster at the State Fair."

And I looked at her and I said, "I cannot wait, "I love it, we're gonna get on those roller coasters, "I'm with you." I was so full of bravado in that moment

that I had forgotten something. I hate roller coasters.

(Audience Laughing) But I was so committed to my need to impress her

that I was unable to see that about myself. Or I certainly wasn't willing to see that about myself, but what I didn't truly love in that moment. So we get to the State Fair, and we're all excited, and we go up to this stand in line for the spleen crusher, whatever it was called, this giant, you know, gravity-defying roller coaster.

And as the bar came across my waist, and we were going click, click, click, click, up up to the highest, we could get up to the very top, and I peered over into the free fall, and I felt that fear wash over me. Everything came into focus.

I do not love this.

(Audience Laughing) In fact, I love being on the ground more than I love that moment, or being up on that roller coaster, and I want it off of that ride.

I'm telling you that story, it's funny,

but it's this picture of the way that I journey with Jesus so often.

I love Jesus.

I do, he's defined my life, he is redefining my life. And I walk with Jesus. He's my savior, and I put my trust in him, and I believe he's leading me on this journey as I put my treasures in heaven.

And I see that, but what I don't see oftentimes is how full of it I am, right? Oh, I put my treasures in heaven, oh really?

And Jesus loves to reveal to me the ways that I don't. And the way it usually goes is like this. I get up and it's a normal day, and I'm just walking through the day with him, and he's leading me.

And I find myself in a situation,

or in a place where it feels like I'm sitting in one of those cars.

I'm like, this seems a little unusual. Why am I going up? Why is there a bar across my waist? Why am I click, click, click, click, click, going up into the, up high into the air?

I appear down the tracks of my day, and I look over the edge, and it looks like a freefall, and it looks like there's something precious to me I'm about to lose.

There's something precious to me that, without that thing, my life will have no meaning. I can't live life without this thing.

And for all of it, it's something different.

Maybe it's your bank account, maybe it's how can I provide for my kids if I don't have what I think I need?

Or maybe it's your career of like you look over the edge and you think to yourself, I never anticipated being here. I vision so different than where I am right now.

Maybe it's your marriage, maybe it's your family, maybe it's your children, I don't know. But we all got something, don't we?

And we look over and we see these things, and these are good things sometimes.

And I think to myself, if I don't have them, life's not worth living, and I can't do it, and they're good things. So Jesus, why aren't you taking care of me? You're supposed to have done this,

you're supposed to take care of me and provide for me in these ways, and it begins to feel like a freefall.

And see what happens in those moments,

these moments of existential horror. What happens is the Holy Spirit actually uses those moments in the same way on that roller coaster, he turns the lens, and all of a sudden, I become very clear and focused, what I love and what I don't love.

Because it's very clear what I'm trusting in and what I'm not trusting in, right?

And as I sit in that moment, the Holy Spirit loves to reveal my sinful heart.

Now I gotta ask a question though, I have a little tension here, because oftentimes when I look over that precipice and the things that stir my fear, the things that seem to be, like at least in light of what I'm just talking about, seem to be sinful, sometimes they're really good things.

Like my ability to provide for my family, that's a good thing, right?

Or my marriage, like that's a good thing, or my ministry, they're all good things. How are those sinful?

I love what Augustine says about this and the way Augustine talks about sin.

And what he says is this: he says that our sin is not so much a behavior disorder as it is a disorder of the things we love.

It's a love disorder.

What he means is we that sin is the true evil genius of sin, is that it misdirects the love of my heart.

If I can get him to love something, a certain way, then I know I can get him to do something.

Very sinister and very hard to see. And it just happens in two ways.

The first way is it causes us to love the wrong things, and these are the obvious things, right? Violence, rock and roll,

for all the things that come with it. The obvious stuff, right?

But the second way that sin moves is it's a little more sneaky, and it's more common, and it's more dangerous.

And this is when sin causes us to love the right things, good things, but in the wrong order.

And what I mean by that is this: it's when we love good things more than we love God.

It's what Tim Keller says. He's one of my favorite writers, he says that when we take the good things of this world, and we make them ultimate things,

that we put them on the throne, we love them more than God, and where God says, "No, don't do that."

Why does God say don't do that?

Because he's insecure and he needs, he's like some toxic relationship that he just needs to have more affection, he needs you to love him more than anything else in the world, no. That's not it.

God doesn't demand our hearts, because if we love something more than God, it's not that it impacts him, though it certainly makes him sad.

The point of what God is saying here is that when we love something more than God, or we put our love of something else above God, it twists our hearts. I don't care if it's our kids, I don't care if it's a marriage, I don't care if it's ministry, it doesn't matter.

If I do that, if I take my marriage or my ministry, and I put it above God, I am asking it to be for me, to do something for me that it was never created to do.

I am asking it to bear the weight of my heart.

I'm asking it to bear the weight of my identity.

And not only does it not work, trust me,

not only will you crush that thing, you will become consumed with that thing.

You will become consumed with yourself,

and you will never be satisfied, and in the end, it will make you a shell of a person.

And we all do it.

Scripture calls those things idols.

As John Calvin says, "Our hearts are idol factories." I can make an idol out of anything.

But in comes the gospel.

Thank you, Lord. In our passage, what Jesus is talking to them, he says to his disciples, he's teaching them about this disordered love, and what he says is two things that the gospel will do. It will reorder the love of your heart, and it will renew our sense of purpose. We take those one at a time. So how does it reorder our loves?

So we're in Luke chapter 12,

and Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, and all of a sudden, his notoriety is gained at this point, and it says there are many thousands of people, and I guess the crowd is anxious about a lot of stuff, and so what Jesus is doing is he's, this is a huge chunk of Scripture, sort of echoes the Sermon on the Mount, and he's doing the, you know, be anxious about nothing thing. He's saying, "Consider the lilies of the field." He's telling them that seek first the kingdom of God, and we come to our passage in verse 32. What does Jesus say? He says, "Fear not, little flock, "for it's your father's good pleasure "to give you the kingdom." So he's trying to get their hearts to relax, and then he, right after he says it, he continues.

So sell your possessions, okay?

Give it to the needy, store your treasures in heaven, stay dressed.

He's talking about his second coming, he says, "Be like men ready, waiting for their master return." And he's coming like a thief. You don't want to catch you when you're asleep. Blessed are those who he finds awake.

Really? Like this is supposed to make me less anxious?

That's like the New Testament version of Santa Claus is coming to town, like he knows when you're sleeping.

Like, better watch out.

And you watch this, you better not cry, because Jesus is coming back, don't mess it up. When I can tell you, and I read that initially, I'm gonna read passages like that. It doesn't reorder my loves, it reorders my blood pressure. Makes me nervous. So I think to myself, am I doing this? Am I staying awake enough? Am I ready enough?

And when you read passages like this, and they're all over the New Testament,

I want to encourage you that we want to slow our role, because sometimes they're not saying what we think they're saying.

There's this little thing in this pattern in the Bible that I want to point out, and it's something that you, it's really important, it's something you see in the New Testament all the time. It's something you find in the gospels, it's something you really see in the writings of Paul, and it's this little pattern that emerges.

And it's this pattern between, I'm about to use two big words, it's the pattern between the indicative and the imperative.

And what that means is this, it's another way of saying that, it's in scripture, God always declares who you are in Christ.

Who you are in Christ, what it means, what your new identity is in Jesus, the indicative, before he tells you what to do.

He will always anchor for us in what he's done, who we are in Jesus, and the imperative is always about how we respond to that blessing that we have in Christ.

It's this pattern, we see it all over the place.

You have to see this because as Christians, our identity in Jesus, who we are in Jesus, who we understand ourselves to be, precedes always what we do for Jesus.

Because if we invert that, we get crushed by the legalism of every other religion in the world.

So what happens here in our passage,

before we're told to keep watch and not fall asleep, what does Jesus say?

He says, "Fear not, little flock,

"for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, the indicative."

God is the Father.

Now listen, we read that, we say that stuff a lot, like our Father who art in heaven, God, Father, Father help me, oh Father, Lord help me, right? We do that, but as a first century Jewish person, if you were to call God your Father, whoa, it's a needle off the record moment. Because God wasn't this Father, Daddy figure to them. He was the Holy of Holies; he had a name, and it was Yahweh. In fact, it was a name that was so holy, you couldn't say it. You ever read your Old Testament and you flip through and you're reading it, something, something, something, and then you see the word Lord in all capital letters. That's not the word, Lord, it's the word Yahweh. But they are so observant of it, it's such a holy name, they won't even write it.

Church history says that the scribes used to, when they would write the name Yahweh, or they wrote it, they would throw their pens away because it was too holy.

So here we have that Jesus is reframing it, not only is he calling them Father, which is insane to them,

he calls them little flock, where he's peeling back the curtain.

And it's like he has a pet name for them. You have children, you ever have a pet name for your kids? You have this nickname you call them that no one else can use, or that'd be kind of odd. Well, here it is for us, he calls them little flock. And he keeps going, he says, "It's the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

And what the Father is saying, he's saying, or what Jesus is saying here, he says, "There's nothing that he has that he's not gonna give you."

There's nothing in the kingdom that he has that he won't give you."

Really?

Because I had a lot of things in my life that I feel like I could use, prove it.

Prove it, there's nothing that he has that he won't give me. Well, he did; he has proved it. You see, as Christians, we live in a very different part of the story.

We know that the only way for us to have a stake in God's kingdom was for Jesus to climb on that cross.

The only way for us to be called into the kingdom of God is to walk through the doorway of the cross and our forgiveness. That is our proof.

How do you tell how much something is worth? How do you tell?

By what it costs, what the price tag that's on it? No, what something is worth is determined by what someone is willing to pay for it.

How much is the father? How much was he willing to pay for you? How much was he willing to pay for me?

Literally everything.

He sent his son to suffer a punishment. He did not deserve it; that we deserved. Why? Two reasons: to give us a reward we didn't deserve, forgiveness, righteousness, eternal life.

But the second reason, it was so easy to miss this. Why did he do this?

Because he wants to be with you for eternity. It's so simple that he wants you, and he was willing to pay that price.

Can you see what you are worth to God?

Listen, I love you. I love you very much.

But if your life was on the line and the only way that I could save you was sacrificing my son, Wylie, for you,

you better run towards the light.

It's not gonna do it.

Doesn't mean I don't love you. It just means that I love my son in such a way that I don't have a reference point for that. But thankfully, I'm not the father in heaven

because it's his good pleasure to give you the kingdom. In order to give it to you, it cost him everything.

And if he paid this price to get you, and he did,

what do you think he's gonna do once that he has you?

He's paid everything. Why would he just drop you in the needs of your life?

What does it say in verse 37? It says, "Blessed are the servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.

Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service." This is the master that comes. This is Jesus. "He will dress himself for service and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them."

You catch what's happening here?

They're waiting up for this master, who is Jesus, to come back. And he's not coming back to catch him and be like, "Ah, you fell asleep," or, "You didn't, good job, bad job." No, he's saying, "Stay awake because I'm coming back to serve you.

And you'll recline at this table

and I'm gonna feed you and I'm gonna nourish you."

Man, it's so cool. Christianity is unlike any other religion in the entire world.

Every other religion, you have these prophets that show up, and they give these instructions, and then you don't need the prophet anymore. You just need the instructions. And if you can navigate this right, maybe you can get to the, you know, win the prize at the end of the day.

But in the meantime, you're this pesky human.

Christianity tells the story of a God who traversed space and time. It tells the story of a God who traversed pain and suffering to serve you, to nurture your heart.

Now, listen, I've lived a lot of years now, not as many as some of you, but I can tell you this, your bank account ain't gonna do that for you.

I don't care how much your spouse loves you, and I'm sure they do, they're not gonna do that for you. They cannot bear the weight of your heart in that way. Your kids aren't gonna do that for you.

When we begin to experience the love of God, in this way, it reorders our lives.

It reorders our lives. You will begin to store your treasures in heaven because you realize you are heaven's greatest treasure.

You are the pearl of great price. You remember that story?

They're digging for it. That's you, you're the pearl. You're not the one digging.

You're the pearl of great price. You're the prize.

So the gospel it reorders our love. It also renews our sense of purpose.

Verse 35 it says, "Stay dressed for your action, "and keep your lamps burning, "and be like the men who are waiting for their master "to come home from the wedding feast."

Now here, when we just hear walking through what we just walked through, that reads a little different, doesn't it?

I'm not waiting in fear anymore.

The indicative changes the imperative. The gospel doesn't require you to be a part of the gospel. It doesn't require my obedience. It produces it.

Because I'm standing here, I'm waiting for this master. Please, I love you. Come.

I'm anticipating it.

Because what I love changes what I do.

Where my treasure is, my heart will be there also.

Let me tell you a story. When I grew up here, right, like most of you,

and one of the biggest, most important culture-shaping things here in Jacksonville, Ortega, in North Florida is what? It's football, right? You're either a gator, you're a dog, you're a Seminole. It's like a denomination of sorts.

And we had to find so much about our lives.

And then the jags come in, and they add a different layer besides heartbreak. They add this whole loyalty, this unifying loyalty that's in Jacksonville.

But I got this unpopular confession. As a young person growing up in Jacksonville,

I hated football. I hated it. I didn't like the culture of it. I didn't like people. I didn't like playing it. I was an athlete. I loved playing sports, but I played real sports like soccer. And I played it. So I left Jacksonville in the late 80s, went up to college in Connecticut, went out to Los Angeles, and DC. I'm, you know, been around, ended up in Nashville. I get married, I meet my wife, I'm back in the South. I'm kind of living my, you know, can do anything I want.

Married, we have our children, I have my son.

And I promise you, the first words out of his mouth was football.

And I thought to myself, okay, here we go.

Here we go. He loved it, SEC, NFL, all of it.

And I remember thinking to myself, okay, son, we'll do this together. So I started teaching about it, and we started watching it. And something weird happened.

Within a very short amount of time, we had a football problem in my house. I loved it. And I still do. I loved it.

It became, I mean, we lived in Jackson, I mean, we lived in Nashville at the time. I was a Jaguars fan during the peak of the Derek Henry years. That's not an easy thing to do. So let me tell you, that means I loved it, right? Why?

Why did I love it?

Why my conversion?

Because when you love someone,
you will begin to love the things they loved.

I love my son. And when I looked at that game through the lens of his heart and through the lens of our relationship, it transformed me in that way.

And this is a simple example, and I'm sure you've all got your own versions of this, but we experience the depth of God's love

and the ways we just talked about, we will fall in love with God. And when we fall in love with God, we begin to love the things that he loves.

What are those things? The things he calls us to do to stay ready, to stay vigilant. What are those things?

You're doing it right now.

You're in church, you're sitting here, you go to church, we worship, we pray, we listen to guys like me go on and on and on.

We sit, we sing songs.

It's the watchfulness of Jesus.

See, when Jesus tells us to stay ready and to live watchfully, it's not about white knuckling it. It's not about putting toothpicks in my eyelids so I don't fall asleep and disappoint him. This kind of watchfulness that Jesus is calling us to it doesn't flow from,

it flows not from this kind of mandate and this sense of fear, it flows out of affection.

The sense of watchfulness, we only live watchfully

if we love the thing we are watching for.

Otherwise, we'll just drift off to sleep.

We love each other the way we've been loved by him.

Do you know Jesus like this?

Do you know Jesus in this way? Are you willing to know Jesus like this?

Are you willing to be willing to know Jesus like this? Because that's all he requires.

Because I know in this room right now, because I know myself, I know some of you feel like you're strapped in a roller coaster.

And you can hear the clicking of the tracks, and you're standing at the top and you're looking down and you see tremendous loss or you see tremendous fear or you see tomorrow you don't wanna face or tomorrow you don't know how it's gonna unfold, and it's really scary.

And I'm here, and if that is you, and I know it's many of you, hear the words of Christ.

Fear not, little flock.

For it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

And he will and he has.

Amen.