

Good morning everyone and welcome to Fellowship Dallas. Let me begin by wishing all the dads out there a Happy Father's Day. I know this is a special day for many of you – especially those first-time dads out there. I also know that today can be a struggle for some – whether it's guys who are still praying for kids, those of you who have a difficult relationship with your father, or even for those of you who may have lost your father recently – I hope that you can find comfort and rest during your time here at Fellowship Dallas. But for those of you who are dads who are here with your family, on behalf of our church, let me say thank you and encourage you to continue to seek Christ in full view of your children.

Every once in a while, someone will ask me a question about preaching here at Fellowship Dallas. Specifically, they'll ask if I get nervous when it's time to get up here and preach. I'm not sure if it's because I'm the young guy or if I visibly look on edge when I preach, but let me tell you the answer – the answer is “yes.” Yes, I get nervous. If the idea of getting up in front of hundreds of people, opening up the Bible and doing your best to convince everyone why we should live differently because of what the Word of God says doesn't get your adrenaline pumping, I think there's something wrong with you.

Of course, though, there was never a time that I was more nervous to stand up here and preach than March, 2012. Why March, 2012? Just over three years ago, I delivered my first Sunday morning sermon here at Fellowship Dallas. And I. Was. Nervous.

Now don't get me wrong – preaching here was something that I had long dreamed of doing. It's not that I didn't want to preach. I was excited about the opportunity. Not only was I excited, I had logged hundreds, even thousands of hours, training for that moment. Personally, I had trained. I went to school to study the Bible, I had taken advantage of opportunities to speak in other venues here at our church and elsewhere. I had sat around a table with other guys once a week and listened to how Gary approaches his sermons. I grew up in church – so I've heard hundreds and hundreds of sermons over the years – my whole life was pointing to that moment. I was trained.

Not only had I trained for the opportunity for years, my sermon preparation for that week was on fleek. Gary had given me the passage to preach weeks before. I had worked on my sermon notes, for days. Gary had read them. Friends had read them. I was prepared. Gary even got up during the announcements that Sunday, announced I would be preaching and gave me a vote of confidence. So not only did I have all of my notes prepared, I also had the lead pastor in my corner vouching for me and rooting for me from the front row. I was prepared.

So after the last song, it was time for me to get up and do what God had sent me to do. And I stepped up onto the stage, put my notes down on the table and started talking. I was nervous and a little uncertain of myself, but I was certain of God and I trusted that Gary wouldn't send me up here just to fall down. And I did it. And then at 11:00, I did it all over again. And when I was done, I was exhausted. You wouldn't think that getting up and talking for 25 minutes, or so, would make anyone tired, but I was exhausted physically,

emotionally and mentally. But tired as I was, I couldn't wait to do it again. I would have done three more services if Gary had let me.

We've all had those times in our lives when hours of preparation lead up to a seminal moment where we are called upon to step up to the plate and take a swing at something. Maybe you were involved in sports growing up and you went to practice after practice until it was time to enter the game. Or maybe you played an instrument, or you danced or you painted and practice after practice, painting after painting led to a recital or a show. And all that piano playing at home leads to sitting down in front of other people and at some point in time, you've got to start playing. Or at your job, all your training leads to your first sales presentation, showing your first home, trying your first case, seeing your first patient or ringing up your first sale.

At some point in time, all of the practice and all of the preparation has to amount to something. All of your training has to lead to something. And the same is true for us spiritually.

During this series, *The Lost Art of Following Jesus*, we are distinguishing between those who are fans of Jesus and those who are followers of Jesus. While fans of Jesus listen to His words, learn about His life and investigate His teachings, a follower of Jesus steps up to the plate. ***A follower of Jesus steps up to the plate.***

We see Jesus' call for His followers to step up to the plate in the sixth chapter of Mark. Specifically, we'll look at Mark 6:7-32 this morning, so if you have your Bible, open with me to Mark 6.

These verses demonstrate the first time in Mark's Gospel where the disciples are sent out to do ministry. This is what Christ had been preparing them for since the start. In the first chapter of Mark, we see that Christ set out to preach repentance and when we get to the third chapter of Mark, we see that Jesus specifically picked men to follow Him for the purpose of sending them out to preach and confront evil. You don't have to turn there, but look at Mark 3:14-15 on the screen. Mark writes, "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) *so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.*" [emphasis added] Even when Jesus was walking around looking for His disciples, He already had it in His mind what He wanted them to do.

Here, the disciples are being sent out for the first time. Let's read together Mark 6:7-13. In verses 7-13, Mark writes, "And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them."

So Jesus sends out His disciples, but one of the first things that jumps out at me is that He doesn't send them out with much. I think this shows followers of Jesus something very important: *The message of Jesus doesn't need accessories.* **The Gospel doesn't need accessories.**

The Gospel doesn't need any ornaments -- it's beautiful on its own. The disciples are sent out with nothing but the clothes on their back. Jesus strips them of everything. No food, no money, no bag -- not even a change of clothes that they could use to keep warm at night. They were required to go out and *talk to someone*. He didn't give them anything that they could use to impress people. He didn't give them anything that they could use to barter. But even though they didn't have any physical resources, they didn't go out empty-handed.

How so? You just said they had nothing -- so what did they have? Well, they have their preparation. They have spent months with Jesus; on land, on sea, in the towns and in the country. They've been listening to His teaching and seen His miracles. He's taught them about what it looks like to broadcast the truth about God and He trained them to understand how different people would hear their message of truth. Not only did they have their training, they also had Christ's authority. In verse seven, Christ grants them authority to confront evil in the name of Jesus. The same authority that commands the wind and the waves, the same authority that heals the sick and brings the dead back to life, the same authority that commanded the attention of people everywhere He went had been given to His followers.

Not only did the disciples have the training and authority of Christ, they had one another. Notice how Christ sends them out in twos. Jesus knew that there is power and security in the fellowship of believers. So these disciples didn't have money or food, but they had Christ and they had each other.

You see, the gospel doesn't need the things we are often tempted to attach to it. It doesn't need the fancy lights or the powerful music. It doesn't need words of eloquence or big screens. The gospel simply needs the power of the Spirit to breathe life into a conversation, into a lost soul. The gospel doesn't need accessories. Now that doesn't mean that accessories are useless. I think our church is blessed to have the musicians we do and the resources to broadcast this sermon not only to the back row of this room, but to the ends of the earth via the internet. But the gospel doesn't *need* those things. It simply needs someone to step up to the plate and preach a message of repentance. A message about Jesus and His values that is so powerful that they seek to live like Him.

But there's another thing that is very important to see in this passage. *The Gospel will meet resistance.* **The Gospel will meet resistance.** Jesus hints at that in his instructions to the disciples. It shouldn't be a surprise, after all, they knew that they were going up against unclean spirits and demons. But Christ gives them instructions about how to handle those situations. In verse eleven, Mark writes, "if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." If the message they were preaching met with resistance, they weren't to stay there

and argue and try to gain an audience, they were to pick up and move on. Time was of the essence.

Mark illustrates the harsh reality of the resistance to the gospel with an account of John the Baptist's beheading in vv. 14-29. I won't read the entire account here – you might want to pick that up and read it later today or later this week – but I'll give you the basic overview. John the Baptist, who had been preaching repentance had been captured and thrown in jail. And through a series of evil events, the King made the decision to have John executed.

What Mark is showing us is that the Gospel will meet resistance. And the hostility toward the message of Jesus will be severe. No one likes to be shown that what the way they're living might be wrong. No one. And the resistance that some people exhibit leads to death.

Today, I could talk about the believers being persecuted in Syria, those suffering in Iraq or the flight of Christians from Egypt. But unfortunately, I don't have to cross an ocean to tell a story of the hostility to the message of Christ. This past Wednesday night, a group of people sat down for a Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina. And as they sat down, another person walked in – one who would betray them. And after an hour of reading scripture – from this same gospel of Mark, by the way – and praying with one another and loving one another, this betrayer took out a gun and took the lives of nine people who were there.

Now we know that racism was the reason he walked into that church with the intent to kill. And honestly, I don't know what the killer's thoughts were concerning Jesus when he began to pull the trigger. But it's clear that the message these people were preaching to one another – this message of Jesus – met with resistance.

The era of confronting unclean spirits and demonic activity did not end when Jesus completed His ministry on earth. We might pretend like it's not there or live life like Satan isn't prowling around us like a lion waiting to devour its pray, but demonic activity is real. This evil racism that resulted in a man killing people in a church is nothing short of demonic. We should be sad. We should be angry. We should grieve and mourn. But we should not be surprised.

Opposition, hostility, suffering; resistance to the gospel is real. And it's not just in Iraq by ISIS. Unclean spirits are alive and well in the United States; in our families and in our workplaces. And this resistance that may be anything from a condescending look to a drawn weapon is real.

Earlier this week, Elisabeth Elliot passed away. She was a strong believer and encourager to the church. If you've never read anything by Elisabeth Elliot, let me encourage you to add one of her works to your list of things to read. She wrote something powerful that I knew I had to share this morning. In her book *These Strange Ashes*, Elisabeth wrote, "To be a follower of the Crucified [Christ] means, sooner or later, a personal encounter with the cross. And the cross always entails loss. The great symbol of Christianity means sacrifice and no one who calls himself a Christian can evade this stark fact."

To follow Jesus means that we will be persecuted. We will be made fun of. We will be called foolish. We will be slandered. We will lose our reputations in society. And we may be stripped of everything we have except our God and each other. The gospel will meet resistance.

So we see that the gospel doesn't need accessories and that the gospel will meet resistance. But I think this passage shows us one other thing: *Following Jesus is hard work. Following Jesus is hard work.* Look at verses 30-32. Mark writes, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves."

When the disciples return, they tell Jesus all that had happened. Everything they had done, everything they had taught. They probably shared their experiences with the people who had accepted the truth and the experiences where they were shown the door. And after telling Him all that they had done and taught, what does Jesus do? He invites them to rest. He invites them to rest. Following Jesus doesn't come easy. It requires every piece of us. Not just the physical, but the mental, the emotional and most importantly, the spiritual. Sharing the message of Christ is taxing, but after you've stepped up to the plate, it is okay to stop. And rest. There is a time to preach and a time to rest.

So this passage holds very important truths for those who want to follow Christ. The gospel doesn't need accessories, the gospel will meet resistance and following Jesus is hard work, but these truths all assume something to be true. Each of these truths assume that the follower of Jesus is obediently stepping out in faith. These truths assume that the follower of Jesus is preaching a message of repentance. These truths assume that you are stepping up to the plate.

And if you hear nothing else this morning, hear this: **STEP UP TO THE PLATE.** *Step up to the plate.* If you are a follower of Jesus. If you have been saved by His grace, then you have everything you need. You don't need to go to school to learn about the Bible. You can – but you don't need to. You don't need to sit and listen to Gary just one more time. You can – but you don't need to. You don't need Jason to go before you and sing to your co-workers, although I would pay good money to see him do that at your office's water cooler. Friends, *at some point in time, we must do something.*

For different people, stepping up to the plate means different things. Ask yourself, who has God placed in your midst? What do they need? If I were to sit down with you over coffee and ask who in your life needs to hear about Jesus, who would you think of? Family, Friends, Co-workers, Neighbors, Strangers, who? Is the best way to represent Christ to that individual simply to listen, or is God calling you to SAY SOMETHING. The disciples were sent to strangers to preach repentance -- that might not be required in your situation. But you are to be at work, preaching the message of repentance. And if you are on the fence and you have to err one way or the other, err on the side of saying something. Don't worry about where the truth falls, just throw it out there.

And let me encourage you – when I say Step Up to the Plate, I’m not saying your job is to hit a Home Run -- leave the results to God. But you’ve got to take a swing at it. At some point in time you have to move from preparation to the plate. Most people at Fellowship Dallas have all the preparation they need. If you are sitting in this room right now, it is *highly likely* that you have all the resources you need. The time is now. Our temptation is to look at the demons/obstacles, but we need to look to Christ and follow His example.

Will there will be some people who are hostile? Even to the point of death. But what was Christ’s response to hostility? What was His response to those who mocked Him as He hung on the cross? What was Jesus’ response to resistance? LOVE. “Forgive them Father, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” The same message of forgiveness uttered by the slain family members in South Carolina to the killer on Friday.

If this week has shown us anything, it’s that we live in a culture that is hostile to Christ, and we live in a culture that needs to hear the message of repentance. There are people all around us who are plagued by the sin of racism and they need Christ because they don’t even know what they’re doing. And Christ gives us the answer. What are we supposed to do? How do we solve rampant racism in our county and in our culture? What do you want *me* to do about what happened in *South Carolina*? It’s right here in this passage.

As believers, we have the opportunity to speak truth to unclean spirits. So when your co-worker tells that racist joke, when your neighborhood looks sideways at the people who don’t look like them, when the people we’ve elected to lead us reinforce policies that deny opportunities to people based on the color of their skin, it is the followers of Jesus who must stand up to these unclean spirits. It is the followers of Jesus who are required to confront the demons of our nation’s past and shine a light in the darkness.

And we – we right here in Fellowship Dallas – have a unique opportunity to be this light! Our church can stand out as a place of Grace, Truth and Love in our city. Last month, we asked everyone to take a survey to see opportunities for growth in our congregation and we are just beginning to scratch the surface of the information in your responses. But one of the things that the Reveal survey showed us substantiated what we already knew. Our congregation, while it has plenty of room to grow, is far more diverse than the average church in America.

Don’t you see what this means? In a culture where people are dying – DYING – in the midst of racial disharmony, we are gathered today –right now – in a community where we can show people – IT IS POSSIBLE! By the power of Christ and by the grace of our Father, IT IS POSSIBLE. White people, black people, Hispanics, Asians, we can all come together in one place, in unity and demonstrate what it looks like to throw racism aside and dwell together.

That’s what this passage is all about. Take what you know to be true wherever you go. Take Jesus with you. Take Jesus with you into your conversations. Take Jesus with you into the voting booth. Take Jesus with you whether you’re at home, at work or at play. And if you have to go onto social media, take Jesus there, too.