



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Palm Sunday April 8/9, 2017 - Jeff Bucknam  
Behold the King - (Matthew 21:1-11)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

A few years ago on a thursday night, which is when we have our youth ministry around here, I had an interesting conversation with a very young lady. She was probably, like, five? Five years old. She was playing with my two boys at the time. I think I was on the church campus for from reason. I wasn't there for the youth ministry, but they put a big air-hockey table out in the hallway, as you do in youth ministries, and so, I was pretty excited to play. You should know something about me. When I play games like air hockey or foosball or whatever, I try to cheat as often as possible [laughter], and in this game I was certainly doing that. You know, if the puck was going to go into the thing I would grab it with my hand and throw it back out and these little kids-- of course if there are little kids around they freak out because they are legalists at heart, and so they are really angry with you because even if they are not playing, they are like, "You're not keeping the rules." That just gets me going. If you want me to keep egging you on, show that it affects you, right? So, I just keep doing it, Finally, this little girl, who is standing at the edge of the table got so upset, she just-- the puck came by, she put her hand right on top of it. She grabbed it and pulled it back and held it by her face and she said, "You're not the ruler of this table! [laughter]. The church is and *I'm* the ruler of this church," is what she said [laughter]. So her mother was near by and heard this and was like, "[gasp]." You know, she like, came over and she said, "I'm so sorry." Anyway, so she went home and her mother wrote me an email the next day. This is what her mother said. She said,

"I just want to let you know the second part of the ruler of the church conversation that I had with my daughter. After we got home on thursday night, I asked her if she had fun with Micah and Ethan..." [My boys] "and she said, 'Yes,' and then I asked her, 'Was Pastor Jeff not playing by the rules?'" and she responded, 'Well mom, God made me the ruler of the church' [laughter] and I said, 'so how do you know God made you the ruler of the church?'" and she said, 'I really don't know, but I just feel something inside. I can't see it or taste it, I just feel something inside that shouldn't be there'... ["That's sin, dear." No, that's not what she said.] "Anyway, I thought you'd enjoy hearing the rest of the conversation and just for the record..." [This is my favourite part.] "We *do not* endorse the ruler-of-the-church thing to our children. In fact, both my husband and I have no idea where she gets this from."

Now, I know her husband, and I know where she gets it from [laughter]. Isn't that great?



So, there's a moral to this story. My moral is that some of us have a misplaced sense of our own authority, and that's the truth in many cases. Jesus was not one of those people, though. In this story, what you're going to find is that he comes into Jerusalem as the king. It's laden with imagery of kingship and authority and power and knowledge. He comes striding into Jerusalem as the one who is going to deliver the people. "From what?" you say. Well, it's a little different than what they expect. It's a great story. It's a great passage to study on Palm Sunday (the week before Easter) and in the next couple of weeks we're going to do this text and then, in the book of Matthew, we're going to do the passage about the resurrection. So, today in this passage we are going to learn two things:

1. All of this was planned.
2. The plan was greater than expected.

All of it was planned. Jesus going to the cross, Jesus entering Jerusalem, Jesus suffering at the hands of men. All of it was planned. And second, the plan was greater than expected.

### **[All of This Was Planned]**

So, here's the first part. All of this was planned. Verse 1 of Matthew 21,

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." [And Matthew adds this little parenthesis.] This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

So, let me give you a little bit of background. There's a certain kind of feeling that the disciples have that you need to have and understand before you actually understand what's going on in this passage. The time of the year, here, is the Passover. The Passover was a national Jewish holiday. It had a rich history. The Passover was a celebration of when the people of Israel were delivered out of Egypt, away from Pharaoh, and by the hand of Moses. Remember when the Angel of the Lord killed the firstborn of everyone in Egypt. This was an annual celebration of the deliverance of the people from that time *and* kind of the inauguration of the nation itself. It was the most important holiday that they had. So, during this time, Jerusalem itself, the city, swelled in size. You had lots and lots of people who came in bringing their Passover sacrifices. In order to get into Jerusalem, or at least the road that Jesus took, he went from Jericho, there, which is a very steep hill. You climb up this hill with all your animal sacrifices, with all the other pilgrims who were going. It's about a thousand meter climb, on foot, over about 27 kilometers. So, it's pretty steep. When you get to the top of this hill, you kind of come over this crest, and you see the city of Jerusalem in front of you. During passover, the city of Jerusalem swelled in size to about two million people. The city itself could not hold that. The city itself, inside the walls of the city could probably hold, some estimates say, about two to three hundred thousand. So, two million people-- you can just imagine the mass of humanity that's there. And as you came up over this hill and you looked at the city filled with people, just spread everywhere, there was a certain amount of excitement that would go inside of you. One reason that you're excited was that you're on top of the hill. Right? Because that's the big climb if you've ever done the Abby Grind or the Grouse Grind, or



whatever. I have not and will not [laughter], but I've been told by some that when you reach the top of a climb like that, you're just like, "All right!" There the adrenalin that comes, like, "I did it!" Well, that's what's happening here. You climb from Jericho to Jerusalem and then you come over this crest and you see the city of God laid before you. There's this certain kind of adrenalin, this excitement that comes on you. "I am in the place where God has acted in history. During the time of year that we celebrate our national identity." The problem, of course, was that the Jews were under the authority of the Romans at the time and so the Passover was, like, contentious at this time.

You can imagine if, lets say, the United States came and they took over Canada. The US is taking over everything. There're tomahawk missiles here, on Vancouver. So they're going to take over Canada, the US does, and they come up. You can imagine, that the one time of the year that would probably be more difficult for the US to take hold of Canada, or to push down the rebellion, would probably be around July 1st. Canada Day. You know, we've got rich history of parades and excitement about being a nation. Well, that's what it was like for Israel. Passover was like that moment where there was sort of an expectation, and they had prophecies to suggest there was going to be a king, a messiah who was going to deliver them, just like all the other deliverers in their history had come and freed them from their oppressors. "God was going to come through the Messiah and he was going to free us." So you have to feel that expectation. Nationalist expectation. Personal expectation. Excitement about being around all of these people. Into this scene Jesus says, "Okay." They get to the top of the hill and in front of them is this little town called Bethphage and the city of Jerusalem, just beyond. You can see it all and he says, "Okay, look, I want you guys, the two of you, to go into Bethphage, over there, and I want you to go into the town..." [Filled with animals, right? Because everybody is bringing their animals for the sacrifice.] "And I want you to go and find this particular donkey, tied to a particular post, and take that donkey and untie it, right? Like you are stealing it. And if someone comes up to you and says to you, 'What are you doing?' you say to them, 'The Lord has need of it,' and they'll be cool with it ." [laughter] I can't imagine if you were asked to do this, and you were one of the two, and you're walking into the city and you're like, "There are animals everywhere, there are people everywhere, I'm not going to steal a donkey from a..." But you do. You do it and then it all works out exactly like it is that Jesus said.

The point in this passage, the more you look at it, the more you realize how in control Jesus is of this circumstance. Listen, I know that there are people that talk about Jesus going to the cross and this day and age and they say, "Wow, it's just an unlucky circumstance that he got caught in the crosshairs of the Roman authorities. You know, he didn't really want to get killed." You know, there are people who argue every year. *Newsweek Magazine* or one of the national magazines in the US or Canada, come out with, "The real Jesus didn't really want to be dead. The real Jesus didn't really want to go to the cross. It was a sad, sad story. Had he made these decisions, it would have gone better." Actually, Jesus made a lot of decisions. All of them to go to the cross. I don't know if this was arranged - the picking up of the donkey from the post. I don't know if Jesus sometime before hand had gone into that town of Bethphage and made arrangements. He apparently had made arrangements, later, to talk to somebody about a passover meal, so maybe he did that. But the point still remains - that this is planned. Jesus recognizes that he's the king going to be riding in on this colt. Planned. There are other parts of this passage, and in fact Matthew's gospel showed that this is planned. In fact, if you look back in Matthew's gospel, one of the things you find is that Jesus has predicted his death three times to his



disciples. They'd be doing just normal things and Jesus will come to them and say, "Hey guys, I know I'm healing all these people, but here's what you need to know. I'm going to go to Jerusalem. When I get there I'm going to be arrested, I'm going to be tried, they're going to kill me and hang me on a cross, and three days later I'm going to raise from the dead. Are we all clear on that?" And the guys are like, "Um, what? What do you mean by cross?" They don't quite get it, so Jesus tells them again, a little while later, and then he tells them again, a little while later. Jesus is absolutely clear as to what's going to happen here, and yet he's striding toward it. And this quotation - did you see it at the end of the passage that we're studying here? Verse 4,

"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion... [He quotes Zechariah here, in the Old Testament.] "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

This isn't just something Jesus has planned in the present time. This is something that he - God the Son, together with God the Father, together with God the Holy Spirit - planned from eternity past. That we are going to go to Jerusalem and this Jesus is going to die for the sins of the world. Now you may be thinking, "Why are you making such a big deal about the planning of this? Why is it so important?" Well, it's important because Jesus isn't caught off guard by anything that's happening here. He's not unlucky to be caught in the hands of the Romans and crucified. He's confidently fulfilling the plan, and that has certain implications for us. Here's two of them. One theological and one very practical.

### **[Theological Implication]**

The theological one is this: Sometimes the way we talk about the Godhead - God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son - and the plan of redemption, sometimes in modern circles, and maybe not among you or others, but in modern circles, what you will hear is, "What happened at the cross was divine child abuse." You may not have heard that, but that is a contemporary viewpoint. And what people say when they're saying that is, "Isn't it a horrible picture, of God the Father, like, beating his child, who's like, '[crying] No!'" And sometimes we tell stories, even in our setting, to try to affirm that, even though unwittingly we don't mean it.

So, you've heard this story before, of the little boy who goes with his father, who is a bridge operator. The little boy goes to his workplace and the father operates the bridge, so it can open up, so that boats can go through, and closes, so trains can come over. There is a particular train, every day, that comes over, filled with prisoners, going to a prison. Guilty men who are being sent to incarceration. So, this father is playing with his little boy. The little boy, at some point, though, because the father gets distracted by work, starts wandering around. The little boy wanders outside of the guard house and he wanders down to the area where the gears of the bridge are located. He thinks this is really fun. It's like a climbing wall, so he starts climbing up through the gears. It just so happens that he is doing this at the very moment that this train is coming, with all the prisoners, across, and the bridge is open. So, the father starts to do all that's necessary to lower the bridge down and the train is coming with all these prisoners. He sees, out of the corner of his eye - this father, from the guard house - he sees down and he realizes that his son is caught in the gears. He has a decision to make in this moment: "Am I going to kill my son to save the prisoners, the guilty, or am I going to kill the guilty and save my son?" So, the



story goes (not a real story, by the way), that the father chooses that he is going to kill his son, and that's what God did for us. Okay, I get the idea that God killed His son for us and that's right, but the problem is, in this image, what you have is a little boy who is unwitting. He has no idea and I'm sure when the gears start to crush him, he's screaming out, "No! No!" That's not the biblical picture. That's not what's going on. What you have is God, from eternity past, making a plan to save people. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit - they are all game. In the stories of the Gospel, Jesus is striding toward Jerusalem. Why? He knows what's going to happen there. Why is he striding?... Because of the plan.

### **[Practical Implication]**

So, the plan of God is unified, but here's the practical one that will probably have more meaning to you. My history is checkered with a real hatred for dentists and I'm sorry if you're a dentist. You just happen to be a tool of the Devil [laughter]. I'm kidding, I really am. I have a tooth that's hurting right now. I shouldn't say that right now, right? "A tool of the Devil, eh?" So, when I was a little kid, though, I honestly, I really was afraid of the dentist, in a very significant way. So, if my mother were saying to me after school one day, when I was a little kid, you know, like eight or nine years old, if she said to me, "Hey, Jeff, we need to go to the dentist", I would actually hide. I had several hiding spots. We had, actually, a large house just on the outskirts of Seattle, and I would hide in different locations in the house where she didn't know that she could find me. We missed several dentist appointments because she couldn't find me. She would be so angry. And you know at the dentist you always have to pay if you don't show up, at least our dentist was like that. See, tool of the Devil [laughter]. Anyway, so, she was getting really angry, so she learned that she couldn't tell me ahead of time, that we were going to the dentist. Instead what she would say is, "Hey honey, do you want to go to Wendy's?" [laughter]. There happened to be a Wendy's right next door to this dentist, so I'd be like, "Yes! Frosties!" and she'd be like, "Great, we'll go to Wendy's and stuff." She'd go right next to Wendy's and she would even park, on a couple of occasions, in Wendy's parking lot, and we'd get out of the car and she'd grab my hand and march me across the bark into the dentists. I would realize about half way through, that we were going to the dentist. "[screaming] No!" Like, I would freak out. There were times I would run back to the car. I hid under the car. I hated the dentist. Hated it. So, here's the thing. The reason I bring this up is because the cross is way worse than the dentist, yeah? I mean, isn't the reason you and I and our society at large is tempted to find out the future. Right? We go and get our palms read, or look at the horoscope, or whatever. We want to know the future so we can avoid the bad things. That's the goal. We don't want to go to the dentist. If I knew ahead of time that I was going to the dentist, I would run the other way. What you have here, is Jesus, knowing full well, that the cross and suffering and death awaits him, and he is striding there. What? Why? Yes, it's the plan of God, but why? "Behold, the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he would give his only son to make a wretch his treasure." Isn't it a delightful thought, that God loved you enough, to send His Son, and the Son loved you enough to bear the cross.

There's a little story that is often emailed around these days. I'm sure you've heard it. It's actually a true story. I looked it up this week and was surprised to find out that this actually happened. It sounds too much like a preacher's story, but it took place. This doctor was telling a little girl who needed a blood transfusion, that the hospital was out of that type of blood. So, unless she had someone who could donate blood of her type, it was a matter of life and death. Well, the little girl's parents said, "Well, she's



got a twin brother.” So, they brought the twin brother in. The little twin brother was sitting there and the doctor said the same thing to him. “Listen, this is a matter of life and death. Your sister needs blood and you have blood.” The little boy’s lips started to quiver and then he had this resolute look on his face. He turned to his parents, he stood up from where he was sitting, he grabbed his mother by the neck and he hugged her as tight as he could. And he hugged his dad’s middle as tight as he could. Then he sat down and he said, “Okay.” They hooked him up to the machine and they started taking the blood out. His sister was laying in a hospital bed near by and he was sitting there with the blood hooked up to him, and with his eyes kind of half open, he said to the doctor, “When will I die?” This little boy apparently had thought that, “It being a matter of life and death” and “She needs your blood,” meant that she needs all of it, and that your life is now being given. Listen, we email this story. I don’t know how many times I’ve received this email from people. Friends of mine, right? “Isn’t this great?” The reason we email it, is because you and I instinctively know that the greatest love you can show for someone, is to willingly give your life for them. Not unwittingly, but to willingly-- to *know* that you are going to give everything for them. This is the way dads talk to their kids. “I will die for you.”

My wife read a book by Nicholas Sparks a while ago, *The Notebook*. Okay, whenever I say that, a lot of ladies go, “HmMMMM, *The Notebook*.” Guys, it’s a book, just keep her away from it. [laughter] Anyway Nicholas Sparks is a great writer, actually, and *The Notebook* is a really good book. He wrote another book. My wife, at one point, was was reading this book and she was on the couch, just crying. I said, “What’s going on?” And she’s like, “[crying] I just need to, just, share this with you.” So, she starts reading. This story is about-- a point in the story where this this family-- there was a fire in their house. The family runs out on the front lawn, and they are on the front lawn, and one of the children is missing. It’s a little boy and he’s sitting in the window above their garage. They are screaming at him, “Jump! Jump!” And they are creating bushes and gathering things so he can jump out onto it. The dad is standing underneath, saying, “I will catch you, I promise I’ll catch you.” The little boy is, just, sobbing, “I’m so scared. I’m so scared,” and he won’t jump. He won’t jump. They can see the fire gathering behind him and finally, the father says, “Enough,” and he throws down everything he’s got and he runs inside that house and he climbs those stairs. He goes into that little boy’s room, through the flames, and he grabs that boy and he thrusts him out that window, just as the flames engulfed the dad. My wife’s like, “[sniffing],” and I’m like, “whoa that’s a little...” (wiping tears) [laughter] No greater love is there, than this: That a man should give his life for his friends. And yet, you do realize that this is the story of the Gospel. It is the great love story because there is one who gave his blood for you, and there is one who endured the flames for you. For you. For me. There’s a song we sing in Church that I can’t get through, quite honestly. It’s called *Before the Throne of God Above*. It’s one of my favourite songs. The first lines are, “Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea; A great High Priest, whose name is Love, whoever lives and pleads for me...” [And then this part, I can’t get the words out, almost every time I sing it.] “My name is graven on His hands...” *My name is graven. Jeff Bucknam. From eternity past, my name was graven on his hands. My name was written on his heart. That God, knowing, Jesus, knowing full well what he was going to face, he went to the cross, he endured the suffering, he took the shame for Jeff.*

There was a monk in the medieval days, who a story is written about. It goes this way: A certain medieval monk announced he would be preaching next Sunday evening on the love of God and as the



shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the cathedral windows, the congregation gathered. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix. First, he illumined the crown of thorns; next, the two wounded hands; and then the marks of the spear wound. In the hush that fell, he blew out the candle and left the chancel. There wasn't anything else to say. See, I'm pushing this on you because I'm pretty convinced that you don't believe - just like I don't believe, deep in my heart - that God loves me like He does. I think you think that, and I know I think that, because sometimes my life goes sideways. It goes into directions that I don't want and I pray and pray and God doesn't answer those prayers. Not the way I want. Even little things, at times, turn me aside and make me think, "But God, do you really love me?" But, the story of the cross is amazing. In those moments, you know what you need to do? You need to light a candle and you need to start highlighting the cross. You need to start highlighting what he did for you. That the Trinity, before the world began, knew you. Your name was written there and he went there for you, and in the moment that he's hanging there, I am convinced that Jesus thought about *you* and he continued that way. No greater love is there, than this: That a man should give his life for his friends. You are his friend. So, you should probably believe the evidence of his love for you and not get stuck just in this moment.

### **[The Plan Was Greater Than Expected]**

Right, number two: The plan was greater than expected. All of it was planned, but the plan was greater than expected. Look at verse six. Jesus sends his disciples into this little town of Bethphage and they are supposed to find this animal. Verse 6,

"The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" [The word Hosanna means, "Save us."] When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred... [That word actually means, shaken. It's a word that's used for earthquakes. Like, he shook the entire city of millions.] and [they] asked 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

Look, if you had gone into the city of Jerusalem and started interviewing people about what they thought about who the Messiah was going to be, they would have given you certain answers. So, you take your little camera and your microphone and you shove it in people's faces and you say to them, "Okay, what's the Messiah going to be like? Give us a name, in the history of Israel, that is kind of a type, or a shadow, of the coming Messiah." You would get some different answers. One of the answers you'd get is, "He's going to be like Moses. I'm not talking about the prior to the burning bush Moses, I'm not talking about the one who ran away into the wilderness and just looked after sheep for years. Not that Moses, the Moses with the stick. The Moses who was called by God and walked into the chamber of the strongest man on the planet at that time and said, 'Let my people go.' The Moses who led those people to the edge of the Red Sea, took that stick, pounded it on the ground and they walked through on dry land. Who went on the other side and held his stick up over the sea and it covered over the strongest nation in the world, thereby freeing the people of Israel from their oppression. *That* Moses,



the one with muscles. The Messiah is going to deliver us. Rome is the new Pharaoh. We beat Egypt, we're going to beat Rome. The Messiah is going to come on his warhorse, striding into the city." You'd get Moses as one of the answers.

You'd also get the answer, David. He's going to be like David, because you know, David killed his ten thousands. In war there was no greater military leader in Israel's history than David. He ushered in the golden age of Israel's history. So, the expectation was, "The Messiah is going to come in and he's actually going to be the son of David, and he is, again, going to be a military leader. "He's going to kick those Romans out. Honestly, if you are a Roman centurion, you'd better look out because it's coming, when the Messiah comes."

One of the other answers you'd get, actually, is the name Judas Maccabeus. You might not know that name. Judas Maccabeus was a leader of Israel, about 200 years prior to the time that Jesus is entering Jerusalem like this. You might wonder, "Why is it that they are waving palm branches in front of Jesus?" The answer to that is, they are actually waving palm branches because of Judas Maccabeus. The Syrians had taken over Jerusalem, at that time, and actually had outlawed that practice of Judaism. They said, "Listen, you can be a Jew here, but you can't practice your religion." Well, Judas Maccabeus was the dude that said, "Listen, not on my watch." In fact, he holed up in a cave for quite a while. For eight great nights. In fact, when they celebrate Hanukkah, that's what they are celebrating. How God, supposedly, supernaturally, kept the fire going in the cave with Judas Maccabeus. Well, Judas Maccabeus, actually, was a pretty good guerilla fighter. So, he fought off the Syrians, so much so, that he ended up pushing them out of Jerusalem. He retook Jerusalem and when he came into that city, he strode along the same road that Jesus is walking on here. And when he strode along that road, it was on his warhorse, with his muscles bulging, and everyone saying, "Hosanna! The king has come." They thought he was the Messiah. He died a couple years later, in battle.

What they expect here is, whoever the Messiah is, he's going to kick out the Romans. So, when he comes in, that's what they're thinking, and it explains everything they're doing. He comes in riding on a colt, which is a little bit odd, to be honest with you. It's not a warhorse. I don't know, I'd want a warhorse, but he's doing it in line with this prophecy in Zechariah, and they're singing, "Hosanna, save us oh great king." And they're laying down their cloaks, which is a sign of submission in that culture, and also, a sign of welcome. You know, gentlemen, if you want to impress the ladies, take your coat off and put it over the puddle. Remember? That's the way you do it. To make her know that you care for her. You roll out the red carpet for the deity, don't you? You roll out the red carpet for the king. So, they are rolling out what they have that's closest to a red carpet. "Here are some cloaks" They put them on the ground. They're waving their palm branches, which is a sign of Judas Maccabeus. On their coins, they actually had images of-- like we have maple leaves, they had an image of the palm, because it was a national symbol. You get the idea? "He's going to win the battle. Look out Rome. Where are you? Where are you? Passover is here. Remember? We were delivered at that time. It's going to happen."

Then, like a week later, the same crowds that are calling him king are screaming, "Crucify him!" How'd that happen? But seriously, what happened? I know people are fickle, they change their minds kind of quickly, but really? I mean, he must have let them down in some way. In what way did he let them



down? Here's the answer: the first thing that Jesus does when he comes into Jerusalem, is he starts clearing the Temple. Everyone expects Jesus to come out and kick out the Romans, but when he comes into the city of Jerusalem, the first place he goes is the Temple of the Jews - their holy site - he walks into the Temple and starts saying to all the money lenders, "Get out!" The violence that Jesus the Messiah shows, is not toward the Romans, it's toward the Jews. "Whoa, wait a minute man, did you not read the Messiah handbook? You're supposed to kick out the oppressor." And Jesus is like, "Yes! I am. And it's you." The reason Jesus was killed, was because he let these people down. They thought he was going to deal with their felt-needs. He actually dealt with their foundational needs. You know that's what Jesus does, yeah? Like, the real issue that people like you and me have is not our family situation or our work situations, even though those are issues. It's not how much money we don't have or the sickness that we do have, our biggest problem is our alienation from God. The biggest problem with the Jews at that time is that they were alienated from God. Jesus had to fix the foundational, the core, the root-need, so that the fruit could grow. He needs to fix your root-need so that the fruit can grow.

### **[Two Applications]**

So look, there are two really important applications to this. Number 1: Be reconciled to God. You *must* be reconciled to God. Listen, I know people come to church for their whole lives sometimes, and they hear messages like that all the time, but they sometimes just nod and think, "Well, whatever, whatever." I'm telling you, you *must* be born again. You will not see the King without it. You need reconciliation. You can try to fix everything else in your life, in order to have a better life, but I'm telling you that the real issue you have. All of those other things are real needs and problems because this core issue isn't sorted. Blaise Pascal, perhaps one of the great thinkers in the history of the Christian church, wrote a little piece called, *Pensees*. In it he describes how people like you and me are greedy for happiness, which we are, right? It describes our whole lives. We are seeking happiness and we are greedy about it. We will do anything we can to have it. We lust after happiness. But, we are also really helpless to find it. I mean, we struggle a lot to figure out what happiness looks like. Pascal writes this, in relation to that greed and that helplessness. He says,

"What does this greed and helplessness proclaim, except that there was once within us true happiness of which all that now remains is the outline and empty trace?" [There's like a hole in you. Like, you were made for a great joy, but it's empty.] "Man tries unsuccessfully to fill this void with everything that surrounds him, seeking in absent things the help he cannot find in those that are present..."

Right? So, you are always looking. The thing you try to fill it with - the present thing - doesn't really work. It fills it a quarter and it does it in a fleeting way, and so you're like, "There must be something else out there that I can fill it with." So, you go to the next thing, but that thing becomes the present thing, and you think that the absent thing is thing that is going to fill it. On and on and on it goes.

"but all are incapable of it. [He says]. This infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite, immutable object, that is to say, God himself."



See, the only thing that fills a God-sized hole is... God. One of the great church fathers, Augustine, said it well. He said, "You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Listen, if you are looking at your life and you are trying to sort out all of the problems, I'm telling you that those are effects of a cause, and the cause inside is your reconciliation to God. That is the big deal and if you are not reconciled to God, you *must* be. Repent and believe the Gospel.

The second, and here we'll finish, right? The second application to this is: You need to remember your reconciliation to God. Look, most of the people I'm talking to are Christians, right? You guys have followed Jesus for maybe a number of years, but it is very possible to be somebody that professes one thing and lives very differently, yes? When I was living in New Zealand - I think I've told this before - I was moving some chickens, actually, out of a barn, at one point. We had to move some chickens and move them in and take the chickens that were in and move them out - the dead ones. I was not very good at it, so I dropped a lot of them on the floor. Well, what was amazing about these chickens is they have these big huge doors that were open and there was, like, the woods and the New Zealand wilderness just outside the doors of this chicken barn. These chickens, no kidding, would line up along the doorway, which was wide open, and they would stand there as if they were looking through a window, but there was no window. Dumb animals. So, I said to my friend, I said, "What in the world are these chickens doing? And he said, "You know what? They are just so used to being in their cages that they have no idea what's out there." So, they look at it, but it's just not attainable, and yet it is right there. Don't be a chicken [laughter]. Just think about this for a minute, Christian. You are reconciled to God. Your future is immeasurably bright. Whatever is happening, right now, no matter what it is, it is a light and momentary affliction. There is an eternal joy awaiting you. The man who has won the lottery, and is on his way to collect his winnings, and has a flat tire, only gets upset about the flat tire if he forgets the lottery. So, you've got to remember. You've got to take that candle and you've got to start looking. "For the love of God, yes, the love of God. The future is bright. I am reconciled to God. That's who I really am. I'm a child of the King. I am the co-heir with Christ." Don't these thoughts, these ideas, just start to accumulate in your heart to the degree that you're like, "Okay, there is a little bit of joy now." The things that are happening in the present moment can take a different light, in light of what's to come. Hosanna in the highest.

Let me pray. Father, I'm praising you today, Father, for what you've done for us. I know we tend to look other places to fill a void that's already filled. We neglect what we have, and God I pray that you would give us a joy in the Gospel. A joy in Christ. A recognition that the big issues in our lives have been sorted and that, father, that has influence on all the other things. Help us not get stuck in moments. Help us to recognize that we are eternal people, loved eternally by a God who is willing to love us to the end. And would you bring us safe home, we pray. In Jesus name, Amen.