

Seek Understanding, Not Miracles, Part 1

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You can open your Bibles to Luke 9, where we're going to be starting into [verses] 37-45.

Raphael Santi, the great Italian artist and architect of the High Renaissance period, had a very bright, vivid, and detailed painting style [that] was very popular at the time. Many of the pictures that he painted were of biblical scenes. Raphael died [of a fever] on his thirty-seventh birthday. His last painting, which many consider his best, is called *The Transfiguration*. It is the painting he died trying to complete, but never did—one of his students had to finish it. *The Transfiguration* painting is unique in that it captures two different biblical scenes. Toward the top of the painting is Jesus, [who is] kind of lifted up, suspended in air in radiant glory, and right below Him to the right and to the left are Elijah and Moses. Below them on a mountaintop are three sleepy disciples waking up to this radiant splendor above them. Then below the disciples, in the lower half of the painting, there is a group of people in chaos. There is a father holding a demon-possessed boy. There are angry scribes asking the disciples questions. There are people pleading and reaching out and one of the disciples is pointing toward the mountain as if to say, "Listen, Jesus isn't here, He's up on the mountain."

What's great about the painting is [that] in the one painting, [Raphael] merged these two biblical events: the one that we looked at last week—the transfiguration—and the one we're going to start into this morning—

the healing of the demon-possessed boy. As we shall see, Raphael saw the great contrast between the two events: one [that] was on the mountain in glory, the other in the valley, with the pain, and sin, and anguish of those below.

In Luke 9:37-50, we have four instances that Luke gives us which reveal that the disciples had a long way to go. They were struggling with a lot of things. In one way, this is very encouraging, [and] although it's kind of a sad closure to [Christ's] Galilean ministry, it's a good thing in that we can be comforted that as messed up as the disciples were, God got them fixed up to do what they needed to do. They became the pillars of the Church. As a matter of fact, Paul says that the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles.

Please follow along as I read Luke 9:37-45:

On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves. I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed

from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.

From this portion of Luke, I want to point out four hindrances that will impede your walk with the Lord at best, and at worst [will] keep you from the kingdom of heaven altogether. The first [point] is this: Don't be unbelieving. Look at verse 37. The text says, "On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him." Remember, we learned last week that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the mountain to pray. It must have been night, because [the disciples] were so sleepy that they fell asleep. Jesus, of course, continued to pray, and that's when He was transfigured. They woke up and saw it. This is the next day, [and] they're coming down the mountain.

The disciples are with Jesus. The parallel text in Mark 9:14 tells us they came down—Jesus and the three disciples—and met up with the other nine disciples. Now they are all together. But, Mark also says that when they came down and they found the other disciples, that those nine disciples were engaged in an argument with the scribes, who were experts in the Scriptures. A large crowd had also gathered and [was] waiting for Jesus, too. Here we see the great contrast that Raphael caught in his painting. Up on the mountain, you have peace, quiet, tranquility—literally heaven on earth. As they descend down into the valley, it's as if they are descending down into hell itself. Waiting [below] is sin, and unbelief, and sickness, and desperation, and arguing, and just general chaos. On the mountain, Jesus is the glorified Lord and King. Down below, for most, He's nothing more than a traveling magician, an entertainer, a philosopher, a curiosity, somebody you want to go try and see if you can. To the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was a threat. To others, Jesus was nothing more than a traveling doctor who could heal their sicknesses and diseases with a word if they could actually get close enough to Him. Every time Jesus healed somebody, that person became the chapter head of the Jesus fan club in his little sector of the world. [That person] told everybody he knew, and this only compounded

the problem that early on in [Christ's] ministry, there were 5-, 10-, 15,000 people crowded to hear Him. Now who *knows* how many people there are—[it's] a huge multitude. Jesus is at the peak of His popularity, and so the masses have swelled to gigantic proportions. He is the traveling miracle man, the feeder of thousands, the great prophet and teacher, and, to some, even the Messiah.

Someone says, “Look! There He is! He’s coming down the mountain and He’s with His disciples.” And a large crowd, like a big flock of goats, moves to intercept Him. Mark, in his account in Mark 9:[15], says, “When the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.” Imagine how intimidating that would be. I mean, you’re coming down the mountain, you’ve had this really great experience, you’ve seen the glories of the kingdom of heaven, you’re walking with Jesus, and you say, “Man, that was so incredible. I’m sorry we fell asleep, Lord, but, man, that was just amazing!”

Jesus says, “We’re going to have more like that.” All of a sudden, you see this stampede—15-, 20,000 people, and they’re all *running* toward you, and they all want something from you. Imagine, if you can, this father with his boy. Or, imagine that boy, that demon-possessed boy, being your son. Imagine the sleepless nights you’ve gone through, having to hear your son scream and not be able to sleep. [Imagine] all the times he tried to throw himself into the fire and destroy himself, [so you have to watch him] every moment. [Imagine] the desperation that you would go through, and the suffering, knowing that your son, your only son, had a demon in him, and there was nothing you could do about it. So as the crowd begins to converge around Jesus, this man with this demon-possessed boy pushes his way through the crowd. He didn’t care to be polite. He didn’t want to wait his turn; he was desperate.

Meanwhile, the scribes are presenting their case against Jesus to the disciples. The boy’s father, though, at this time presents his case to Jesus about his boy. He first begins, if you look at [Luke 9:]38, with the request, “Teacher, I beg You to look at my son,” which means “look at him, see him

suffering, and do something about it, if You can.” The desperate father then presents seven arguments in an attempt to persuade Jesus to cast the demon out of his boy:

1. He is my only son;
2. A spirit seizes him;
3. My son suddenly screams;
4. The spirit throws him into convulsions;
5. He foams at the mouth;
6. The spirit leaves him with great difficulty;
7. It mauls him whenever it does leave him.

Mark adds three more symptoms in Mark 9:17-19, and says the demon makes the son:

1. Mute so that he is unable to speak;
2. It caused him to grind his teeth; and
3. It caused him to stiffen out.

If you have any experience in medicine, you know what this is—this is a classic case of grand mal epileptic seizures. But in this case, we’re told they were caused by a demon inside this boy. What a pathetic and heart-wrenching situation. Just picture in your mind this huge crowd, [and you are] this father who has pushed his way through [the crowd with his] boy. Who knows what [the boy] looks like? Raphael painted him with his eyes kind of rolling back in his head. What medicine, what surgery, what herb or homeopathic remedy can heal your boy? Nothing. Nothing will work except a miracle. You need a miracle.

Some people, when they read texts like this, think to themselves, “Well, Jack, come on, now. This is all fascinating, and you’ve got my attention, and I’m glad to read about the demon-possessed boy, but, hey, I don’t deal with demon-possessed people—at least not that I know of. Sometimes I

wonder. But I don't know when someone's demon possessed, and even if they were, I don't have the power to cast out the demons, and so, it just doesn't seem that relevant."

Well, if this is what you're thinking, I just want to ask you some questions [and] we'll see if we can show you the relevance of the situation. Does the Bible say that all unbelievers are of their father the devil and are children of Satan? Yes [see John 8:44]. Does the Bible say that unbelievers are deceived by Satan? Yes [see 2 Corinthians 11:3]. Does the Bible say that Satan is working in the "sons of disobedience"? Yes [see Ephesians 2:2]. Does the Bible say that Satan has "blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel"? Yes [see 2 Corinthians 4:4]. Does the Bible say that all unbelievers are held captive by Satan to do his will? Yes [see 2 Timothy 2:26]. Does the Bible say that it takes a miracle of God—salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ—to save that person from their slavery to Satan? Yes [see Galatians 5:1]. The world is full of people *very* much like this boy.

I'm certain there are some here today who know in their hearts that they have never repented of their sins and given their lives to Jesus Christ. They are in this category. Oh, they're not possessed—that is, they don't have one or more demons within them, totally controlling them from within—but they're still ruled, governed, deceived, used by Satan to do his will. Do they need a miracle of God? Yes. They may not be foaming at the mouth and suffering from epileptic seizures, but they're suffering from something far worse: unbelief. It's one thing to suffer a seizure and get thrown down, scratched up, or burnt in the fire. It's another thing to be unbelieving, and die, and be thrown into the lake of fire forever. That is a far worse situation. It is only the miracle of God's grace through the preaching of the gospel that can set someone like this free.

Charles Wesley's classic hymn "O, for a Thousand Tongues" has two stanzas in it [that] say it all:

Jesus! the Name that calms my fears,

That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

There are billions on the face of our planet *right now* who need to be set free. These are the “foulest” who need to be made clean. Satan is working in them, and they are sliding down a slippery slope into the mouth of hell, and many of them don't even know it. They don't even know it!

In the first century, the Holy Spirit gave a select few people miraculous gifts so that they could cast out demons and heal all manner of disease and sickness [see Matthew 10:1]. We've talked about this [at] length. We've learned before that the reason it happened is because God was writing the New Testament and so those miracles authenticated the messengers. But once the messengers had written out the New Testament, the power [was] not in the miracles, but [was] in what? The Word of God. That's why Paul says in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” or the Gentile.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that our text [in Luke] is nothing more than an event in history to be pondered and marveled at, something that must have been really significant *back then*. It is God's Word, and it is God's Word for you and for every other person, today and every other day. It gives us part of what we need for “life and godliness” [2 Peter 1:3]. People like this boy in the text are enslaved to sin and Satan, and they are all around you. They are in this room and they are in the world by the billions. God has given you the instrument to set them free, which is the gospel.

Who, if they had the power to cast out demons, would deny this father's request? How could you do that? Nine of the apostles were in the crowd.

They were given authority to cast out demons—we know this from the beginning of Luke 9. If you remember, [Jesus] sent them out and they came back and said, “Hey, the demons were subject to us” [see 9:10]. They were pretty psyched about it. “Yeah, we had demons, man, and they were submitting to us.” So we know that they had the power, we know it was given to them, and we know they had success in casting out demons. Why didn’t they help this desperate father?

Well, we find out when we look at [Luke 9:]40, where the father of the boy continues: “I begged Your disciples to cast it out.” Did this father ask for help? Oh, yeah, he *begged* them. Imagine yourself standing there [and] you’re one of the nine who is down below waiting [for Jesus to return from the mountain]. Some father comes to you, and he’s on his knees, [and] he’s begging, “Please, please help me. My son is demon possessed. Please cast it out. I know you can. I’ve heard stories that you’re able to do this. Please help him!” You can just see him there, miserable and desperate. Wouldn’t you be moved with pity to help him?

Wouldn’t you have compassion in your heart and say, “Sir, no problem,” and help the guy? It would cost you nothing—“freely you receive, freely you should give,” right [see Matthew 10:8]? Well, then, what happened? Why is the demon still in the boy? Why didn’t they cast him out? Look at the end of [Luke 9:]40, where the boy’s father says: “And they could not.” It’s not that they *would* not, but that they tried and *could* not. They could not. It wasn’t working. The demon would not come out; they had no power over it. You can just see them, one-by-one, commanding the demon to come out.

Matthew says to Bartholomew, “Son, step aside. Let me show you how it’s done. I command you in the name of Jesus, come out of him!” And nothing happens.

Then Andrew says to Matthew, “Nice try, brother. Let me show you how I like to do it. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I adjure you by the most holy God, come out of him!” Nothing happens. They can’t do it. It’s not working. Notice that the man says in verse 40 not that “I came to *one*

of Your disciples,” but, “I begged your disciples” plural, “to cast it out, but they” plural, “could not.” Man, they tried—the whole batch of them, [but they] couldn’t do it.

We have learned before that when someone has a miraculous sign gift, when they do some sort of miracle, it is really God who does the miracle through them. They are just the agent, or the tool, that God uses. It is exactly like the miracle of salvation. You know, let’s say you’re out and talking to some friend that you’ve been praying for, and you share the gospel with him. The person repents and believes, and his life is changed. Later on, you tell your [other] friend, “Yeah, I saved that guy.”

Is that what you say? No! People would [wince, and say,] “I don’t think so.”

Now, you might say something like, “Well, I led that person to the Lord,” or “I shared the gospel,” or “God used me to bring that person to Christ,” but everybody knows that *Christ* saved the friend, not you. There is no difference here. When these men were doing miracles—healing the sick and casting out demons—it was God’s power working through them. So you know that God’s power didn’t fail in this situation. It wasn’t God’s problem. In this instance, the disciples came face to face with failure. Like Sisyphus, who repeatedly rolled the stone up the hill only to have it go back down in failure, they repeatedly tried to cast out the demon but encountered failure. To make things worse, they had to deal with the scribes.

“I told you! I told you you couldn’t do it! Jesus’ name doesn’t work. I told you!”

It’s like, “Oh, leave us alone.” And there was the desperate man with the desperate demon-possessed boy, and everybody was frustrated. What do you do?

But the question we must ask and answer is: Why? Why were they unable to cast the demon out of the boy? The Holy Spirit didn’t fail, so there was another reason. Well, Jesus just happens to give us two reasons, if you look at the text in [Luke 9:]41: “And Jesus answered and said, ‘You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up

with you?” I was reading *Harmony of the Gospels* by Thomas and Gundry, and they were saying [that] this is one of the clear places—maybe the *only* place—in the gospels where Jesus actually shows some exasperation. You just wonder how He said it. When all this is going on, all this bickering is going on, and this arguing, and the man is pleading, you wonder if Jesus [shouted], “You *unbelieving* and *perverted* generation! How long am I going to be with you? How long am I going to put up with you?” Or whether He said [in a low voice filled with anguish], “You unbelieving and perverted generation. . . .”

Either way, His comments are pretty aggressive, aren’t they? How would you like to be labeled that? What does Jesus think of you? “Oh, I’m just unbelieving and perverted.” It’s a slam no matter how [it was said]. But did you see the first reason why His disciples were unable to cast out the demon? They were an “unbelieving generation.” There is a negative form of the word “faith,” and that’s what’s used here: “anti-faith, unbelieving, infidel, faithless.” Jesus borrows words from Deuteronomy 32:5, where Moses, in his song, speaks of the rebellious Israelites as “a perverse and crooked generation.”

But, you need to ask yourself, “Who do these comments actually apply to? Is He talking about the boy’s father? Is He talking about the scribes? Is He talking about the disciples? Is He talking about the crowd? I mean, who’s He talking about?”

Well, some have said, “Oh, well, it’s only the boy’s father He’s talking about,” or, “Obviously the scribes, too,” or, “Oh, He’s only talking about the unbelievers in the crowd.” They say, “The disciples, they were already believing. They had already left all to follow Jesus. He’s not talking about them.” Oh, really? Did Jesus ever say to His disciples, “Oh, ye, of little faith” [see Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, etc.]? [Did] you ever wonder who that character “Oh ye” is who lives in the town of “little faith”? In Matthew’s account of this incident, we learn what the problem was, because they actually [went] to Jesus in Matthew 17:19, and they ask[ed] Him specifically, “Why couldn’t we cast the demon out?” Then in verse 20 of

Matthew 17, Jesus says—here’s the reason—“Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.” Matthew makes it clear that the disciples themselves were lacking faith. Or, you could say, [that] they were possessing unbelief. Jesus implies that though they had faith, it was smaller than a mustard seed. I’m telling you, that’s little—mustard seeds are little.

Mark adds, in Mark 9:29, that their lack of faith was also expressed by their failure to pray. Prayer, I remind you, is an act of faith. Why? Because when you pray, you have to: 1) Have faith that God exists; 2) that He hears your prayers; [and] 3) that He has the power to do something about it. You’re acting in faith the whole time. But [the disciples] didn’t do that, so [they] are definitely included in the “unbelieving generation.” The scribes were also clearly included. The crowd was also included. But what about the boy’s father? You might think, “Well, he is, after all, coming to Jesus. He must believe that Jesus can heal [his son].” Well, Mark tells us in Mark 9:22, that the father said, “But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” *If* You can. Do you know what Jesus said in response to that? “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes” [9:23], which reveals [that] the man was doubting that Jesus could heal his son. Then, in response to that, the man said, “I do believe; help my unbelief,” condemn[ing] himself as having a faith problem. “Yeah, I need help. Help my unbelief.” So he doubted that Jesus could heal his son. He said he had faith, but that he also had unbelief and he needed help with that.

But you know what? The main thing was [that] he just want[ed] a miracle. He needed a miracle, but he wasn’t seeking understanding. He wanted his boy healed, but he didn’t want to step back, and say, “Who is this guy? What is He doing here? What’s going on? How do I escape the wrath of God to come?” The big picture—the most important things—were never an issue to him. He just wanted his boy healed. That’s why unbelief is the grotesque mother of all sins. It lurks in every heart; it’s waiting to just deny

the truth, fling it to the ground, and trample it underfoot. Unbelief is the universal plague of humanity. Everybody has it and, this side of glory, it's incurable. It is the root cause of all sin—unbelief.

Most of us, when we hear the term “unbeliever,” quickly think of the heathen, the God-hating atheist who shakes his fist at God and says, “I don't believe in God!”

I want to say, “Well, why are you talking to Him?”

“He doesn't exist!”

“Who?”

“God!”

“I thought He didn't exist.”

That's certainly one kind of unbeliever. You've got the person who just denies the Bible, denies [that] God exists, and they're out there in the world. We all know that. The world is full of men and women, businessmen, housewives, junior high, high school, college students who refuse to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, refuse to believe that He lived a perfect life, that He was the Son of God, that He died on the cross for our sins, that He was buried and rose again on the third day. They refuse to believe it. They *will not* believe.

“Oh,” one says, “there are so many translations and transliterations of the Bible, how do I know that the Bible is true? And even if it is true, how do I know it's not corrupted? How can I trust in a book that's been copied so many times? My god is a god of chance. I believe [that the earth was created through evolution over] millions of years.” Really? Go home [and] lock up your house. Wait a year [and] come back and see if it's better than it was. Wait a thousand years and see if your house [does] everything it did before and something else better. It would be nothing but a big pile of termite dust.

But, so, the unbeliever atheist says, “I have my own laws. I govern my own life. And when I die, I will transfer into nothingness and the only thing that will be remaining of me will be the memories [in the] minds of people who knew me.” The world is full of such people like that. They are like the

boy in our text. They are blinded, captured, deceived by lies, inflicted with convulsions of unbelief, foaming at the mouth with scoffing, and thrown down with pride. They are confident that their error is leading them into nothingness, when really it is leading them to eternal torment. God put His law in their hearts that they would know for certain that He exists. God gave them a conscience so that they would know He exists. God created the world. It doesn't matter whether you look at the universe through the Hubble telescope and see the complexities and order of the universe, or whether you look in an electron microscope and look at the molecular level of things. There is great engineering and design at all levels, so that [unbelievers] are "without excuse," every one of them, Paul says [in Romans 1:20]. But he also says that all men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, they sear their own consciences with a branding iron, and they will not believe [see Romans 1:18]. That is definitely one kind of unbeliever.

There's another kind of unbeliever that I like to call the "religious unbeliever." These are the many who call themselves Christians, but it's only a profession—it's only lip service. They never read their Bibles, they don't pray unless there's a crisis, and then it's "God bless America." They never go to church, or they rarely go to church. If they do go to church, it's the exception rather than the rule. They are religious unbelievers. They've decided to align themselves with Christianity for various reasons: because they like the morality, they like the higher ethics, they like the nice people that come out of the church, because they want to be seen in that light, because it's good for business, because it appeases their consciences, because it earns them respect, or whatever.

But to the religious unbeliever who never really goes to church, being a Christian is not any different than saying, "I belong to this political party," or, "I have this specific opinion." [It is] something that never really changes the way they live. The Bible commands them to go to church and participate in corporate worship, but they do not. The Bible commands them to exercise their spiritual gifts in the context of the local church, but they do not. Why? [It is] because they can't. Why? Because they can't offer up

any acceptable worship to God because they don't have any spiritual gifts—they're spiritually dead—that's why. Every time they pray is an abomination because the Scriptures say [that] "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD" [Proverbs 15:8]. They cannot worship and they cannot exercise their spiritual gifts because they don't have any. They are dead in their trespasses and sins. Just dead.

Somebody comes up to you, and says, "Hey, I'm a member of the Sierra Fly Fishing Club."

"Really? Cool. So, what does it cost? What are the dues to sign up [for] the club?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've never paid any dues. I just belong."

"Well, what kind of fly fishing do you do? Do you dry fly, or wet fly, [do you use] streamers?"

"Oh, I don't fish."

"Oh."

"Yeah, I don't fish. I don't even have any fishing thingies or stuff, or whatever you call it. I just belong to the club."

And you say, "Well, how can this be? How can you belong to a club without signing up, without paying any dues? How can you call yourself a fly fisherman if you have no fly fishing gear and you never fish?"

"Well," says the man, "I'll get around to paying my dues someday, [and] maybe getting some gear. Most of all, though, I just like the thought of being a fly fisherman. So that's what I'm calling myself."

That's how most Christians are in America today. That's exactly how they are. "Oh, I don't read the Bible, I don't go to church, I don't give, I don't serve. But I'm a Christian." No, you're not. You're a religious unbeliever. You've never repented of your sins, you've never placed your faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, you do not have the blood that washes you from all of your sins, you never have worshipped God, you've never one moment walked in the power of the Holy Spirit. You sin and only sin—always. You have no spiritual gear because you don't know Christ, and so you cannot serve Him.

That's how it is. You ask them about the Bible, [and they say], "Oh, yeah, I've got a Bible."

"Where?"

"Well, it's on the book shelf above my favorite chair." It just kind of hangs there like a razor-sharp, double-edged sword [see Hebrews 4:12] suspended by a thread. They could reach up there and grab it by the hilt, and it would do them great good. It would save their lives. It would defend them. It would protect them. But they just ignore it as that thread grows ever weaker and judgment waits to fall on them.

Maybe this describes you. Maybe this is one of the rare Sundays you actually happened to come to church, and you're thinking to yourself right now, "*Why* did I come on this Sunday? I haven't been to church in months and now I show up, and the preacher's jumping down my throat with a sword." Well, the reason you're here is because God wants you to be here [and] because God, by His providence, has led you to this place so you could hear what His Word has to say. So that you would know that you are not a Christian and you're not going to heaven by merely calling yourself a Christian. So that you would know that there is a way to heaven, but it's not the way you're going.

Yet, most of you probably fall into another category if you don't know the Lord, and that category is the religious unbeliever who's kind of involved in church. Here you are at church, you have denied yourself sleeping in [or] going to Home Depot. You could have done anything else—gone out to breakfast—but instead you've sacrificed your whole Sunday morning to come here, sing songs, and hear me preach at you. Maybe you read your Bible fairly regularly and pray as a habit. Maybe you have even served in some ministry, or are serving in some ministry, and maybe you're even a member of Calvary Bible Church, but you are another category of religious unbeliever. And you know what? I fear for you the most. My heart goes out [to] you the most. I pray for you.

The reason that my heart goes out to you the most is that God commands me to shepherd the flock of God, and if you come here regularly,

I take that seriously. I don't want to see you sit here week after week, and die, and go to hell. [If] you come here [and] you hear me preach, I want you to know: your blood is not on my head. I know it's not. The Great Shepherd has charged me in His Word to shepherd you, to lead you to green pastures, to command you to repent and believe, and yet, you just haven't quite gotten around to *that* yet. Maybe someday [you'll do it]. I cannot bear to think of any one of you on judgment day, huddled with the goats [see Matthew 25:32], terrified, knowing judgment is coming, looking across the throne room of God Almighty, and making eye contact with me. There is a reckoning coming, and you know it, and I know it. Jesus then looks at you, and says, "Did not my servant proclaim the gospel to you? Did he not warn you of hell? Did he not tempt you with the joys of heaven? Did he not show you the way to be saved, to call you to repentance and faith in My Son?"

What will you be able to reply to that? What could you say? "Well, I didn't want You ruling over me. I did not want to turn my back on my sins. I thought I would wait and spend all of my energy and all of my years serving sin, self, and Satan, and then after I was all used up, when I was ninety-five percent gone in the grave, then I'd give my life to you and escape from the fire"? Is that what you'd tell Him? Will you say, "Well, I didn't know You existed. I didn't know the Bible was completely true"? Will you bring up transliterations, and translations, or natives in Africa?

There will be nothing for you to say. You will be "without excuse" [Romans 1:20], and Christ will say, "Cast this stubborn, unrepentant sinner into a place that they have chosen for themselves, for I desired to save them, I called them to repentance, but they would not believe. They did not want My love, they did not want My grace, they did not want My free offer of salvation, so cut them down and throw them into the fire." Religious unbeliever, you need to tremble and you need to wake up. The wrath of God is coming. Christ is coming. You may die tomorrow.

I just read a story of [George] Whitefield's brother. George Whitefield was one of the greatest preachers that ever lived in England. He came to America, preached, [and] was part of the Great Awakening along with

Jonathan Edwards. [He was] a companion of Charles Wesley. Whitefield had an unbelieving brother who was wicked. He was wicked, and vile. He just sinned and plunged himself into every bit of ruin he could. He came to hear his brother preach, and his brother preached at him and preached at him along with everybody else, like he always did—with ferocity. And [Whitefield's brother] was moved. It finally struck home [that] He was on his way to hell. And so, at a prayer house, he sat down with Lady Huntington, and he said, "I am lost. I am *lost*."

And she said, "I'm glad."

He said, "What do you mean? That's cruel! How could you say you're glad that I am a lost man?"

She said, "And I am so glad, because Jesus came to seek and save the lost. So that makes you savable."

He broke down, gave his life to Christ, walked outside the house, and collapsed dead.

God has given you His Word. It is in your hand—and if it's not, get a copy out of the pew in front of you. You can have it. God has sent me to tell you that there is salvation in Jesus Christ, and Christ alone. That it is salvation that is free, of total grace and mercy. That you cannot earn it, you don't need to do anything, you just cry out to God, and He saves you. As John said in John 1:12-13: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." And this is what God offers you: free salvation in Jesus Christ alone. As Jesus told the Pharisee Nicodemus in John 3:7, "You must be born again." We have to be born to get into this world to live in *this* world, physically. Well, if you want to live in heaven, spiritually, you [have] to be born of the Spirit. It's just how it is. And this is the good news: God will do it. God will save you. God will transform you.

But then you hear somebody [who says], "Jack, I'm too great of a sinner. Oh, Pastor Jack, if you only *knew* the sins I've committed, you'd faint." Well, listen, I'm not the Savior. I don't need to know your sins.

A lot of people come to me and confess all their sins to me, [and I say], “I’m not a priest. There is the High Priest [see Hebrews 4:14], go to Him!”

Think about this. [If] you think your sin is too great, do you know what you’re saying? “My sin is greater than Christ, greater than Christ’s sacrifice, and Christ’s love, and Christ’s mercy.” No, it’s not. Jesus died to save *sinners*. He died to save sinners—great sinners. Get this: before you were created, before the earth existed in eternity past, God already knew all the sins you would ever commit, and yet He still sent His Son to die on the cross, so that you, through faith in Him, could have the free gift of eternal life [see John 3:16]. As Paul says in Romans [5:8], “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

But another objects, “Well, I *would* believe, but there are things I don’t understand. I mean, I have to have some answers first. Where did evil come from? How does predestination work? It seems that science has proven [that] the Bible is false. How can I believe in it?” Nonsense. Friend, you’re going about it all the wrong way. This is what you’re thinking: “OK, first I come to God, I judge Him, I judge His Word, and once I am fully convinced that God exists and the Bible is true, then I will believe.” That is backwards. The Bible says, “No, you first believe so that you receive the Holy Spirit who then leads you into all truth” [see John 16:13]. You don’t get the facts, be fully convinced *so* you believe, you believe so you get the Holy Spirit so you can understand the facts. That’s why God says, “Repent and believe” [Mark 1:15], so that you can receive the Interpreter, the illumination of the Holy Spirit into your life. If you’re going to wait around until you have all the mysteries of heaven solved, good luck because it’ll never happen. Even when you are saved, you still don’t know the answers to things. But what we do know is written in this Word, the “more sure” Word of God [see 2 Peter 1:19], and it teaches us that we must first believe that we might know.

Still other people object, “Well, I fear for my soul because I cannot believe. I know I can’t believe. I am so enslaved to certain sins, they have so plagued my life that there have been times in my life when I’ve tried to do the best I can to get my life kind of straightened out so I can become a

Christian.” No! “Just as you are, without one plea, but that His blood was shed for thee.¹ You come so that God can change you. You don’t have to be sanctified so you can be saved; you get saved so you can be sanctified! It’s backwards again! So cry out to God. Use the same prayer as the boys’ father: “Lord, help my unbelief” [see Mark 9:24].

Picture God. You’re crying out to Him, you’re sincere in your heart, you know you’re a sinner, you know you’re going to be judged, you know you haven’t given your life over to Christ, and you want to believe. So you come to Him, and say, “Father, help me. I am an unbeliever. I’m afraid I can’t leave my sins. I can’t do it!”

Now, [do] you think God’s going to say, “Listen, I sent My Son to die for sinners, but not you, pal. I can’t be helping you—you *want* help. You’re asking for grace here, and mercy. What do you think I am, some sort of dispenser of grace?” It’s foolish. There’s only one person He turns away, and that’s the person who will not ask for help, who will not believe, who will not say, “Lord, help my unbelief.” He will never turn anyone away. He will not refuse you, He will save you, and He will change you for forevermore. Your sin is not greater than His grace.

Well, time has run out. This is the problem: we’ve only [gotten] through the first part of point one! So, Lord willing, we will try and come back next week and chisel into the tree a little more. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You so much for what we were able to learn here. Oh, the consequences of unbelief, how it is not only prevalent in atheists, but also [in] religious people, and, as we shall learn next week, even in Christians. Father, I pray that You would help anybody here who realizes that he or she is deserving Your judgment, that he or she is not truly saved, that he or she has never been born again, that he or she has never received Christ, and never become Your child to walk in holiness after You. Father, please grant him or her the repentance he or she needs. Break his or her heart, help him or her to cry out for salvation. May he or she cry out, “Lord,

¹Taken from “Just As I Am,” by Charlotte Elliott.

help my unbelief.” And, Father, we know you never turn sinners away. You never reject them. You always receive them because You came to “seek and save the lost” [see Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10]. So, Father, may that happen this morning in many hearts. For the rest of us, may we trust in You, [and] not be unbelieving, but believing [see John 20:27], because we know that You reward those who have faith and live by faith. So, Father, help us to be that way. We pray this in Christ’s name, Amen.

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