

Pursuing Passion, Part 2

By Dr. Theonnes

[Musical Introduction]

Worship Leader

Lord we pray that you will have your way with us. Or that you will use us. God, we praise you. We praise you because you are consuming fire that you sent your Holy Spirit down to just to dwell within us. Right now, we want to proclaim that there is no one like you. There was no one like you, and you are unchanging God.

[Music Continues]

Worship Leader

Lord, we praise you because there is no one like you that we praise you for that or is all in your name.

Announcer

For that, we give praise. Well, we thank you for bringing us here together as one unit to praise your name. We thank you for all that you're doing through Torey. Got all that you've just been moving in this place. We thank you for that. Your son's name, we pray, amen, right. He

surprisingly worship teams never and ahead of time, thank you, worship team that was so good.
Andrew Tay's with Eric Thomas.

I said, Andrew, do you want to just give me some personal dirt on him or simply lead in prayer?
And he said, I will simply lead in prayer. We are so thankful for those who have taught the word
this week. You guys know that there has been a 24 hour prayer chain all during conference that
may have happened before, but not in my recollection. That's dangerous because I'm getting to
be old, but I really think that it's the very first time I know that, Eric.

I know that one of the other speakers actually was there to join them on a regular basis. We know
that the power of God is in and through his word, by his spirit. We know that he's released
himself through the prayers of his people. So let's thank the Lord as Andrew comes to lead us in
prayer. Let's be much in expectation for what he's going to do. Just two sessions left, but that's a
ton of time for the Lord.

Speaker 3

Let's pray together. Father, God, we thank you for the time to set a few days apart and to focus
on what your word says and to to come in, expect to be changed by that. I ask that you would
that you would put your spirit on our hearts right now in a in a way that challenges us to be
prepared to to listen and to be changed, even as Dr. Thomas challenges to you on Wednesday.

Um, so I just asked Lord that you would that you would help us to come expecting to meet you face to face right now and expecting to have our lives changed by your word and by your spirit.

I just pray for Dr. Thoennes that you would, um, anoint him and that you would give him your word to speak your name. Here's Dr. Thoennes.

[Applause]

Thoennes

Actually move furniture for a job for quite a while, so thank you for the applause, I did that well, didn't I? It has been a delight to be here teaching at our week this week, I am so thankful, Donna and I count the joy of our lives to be here ministering, teaching, living, learning, growing, walking with Jesus together with all of you.

You are precious people. And we have a deep love for you and are so thankful for how teachable and eager to learn and grow and how hungry to know God you are. There's nowhere else we'd rather be in nowhere, no one else we'd rather be spending our lives with and all of you. So we're deeply thankful for this privilege. We've had to be able to share this week with you. It's been a great week.

We've been so encouraged in our souls and we pray that all of you have been as well. I believe God's been doing good things in our lives this week.

Well, we've been talking this week about pursuing a passion for Christ, something that we can't manipulate and control, but something that God wants for us, something that we go to him for.

And on Wednesday, we talked about pursuing a passion from Christ through proclaiming Christ that as we get a glimpse of who Jesus is, our passion for him develops and we can do nothing but proclaim in him and in the proclamation of him, our passion for him intensifies. It increases.

There's something about giving something away that increases its value to you.

So we pursue a Christian proclaiming Christ, and then yesterday we talked about pursuing a passion for Christ through obeying Christ, that as we understand who Jesus is, as we're taken over by his beauty and his excellency, we obey him, he said. That's one of the main distinguishing characteristics of someone who really loves him. They obey him. And today, I want to think about pursuing a passion for Christ by depending on Christ proclaiming Christ

obeying Christ. And today I want to think about pursuing a passion for Christ by depending on Christ.

What he's done on our behalf, I really want to just think about the gospel today, God's transforming power in our lives. Whenever I have a student who comes to my office very often when they're struggling with their faith, feel cold or distant from God or are doubting him, I will often ask a very simple question. I'll say, tell me how you came to Jesus. Just tell me that story one more time of that Sunday school teacher, that mother who led you to Christ or that youth group leader who led you to Jesus, that youth pastor.

Tell me one more time that good old story of how God grabbed a hold of your heart and changed you forever. Sometimes that's an important thing for us to do, and, you know, it's amazing how often that student will say to me, you know, it's been a long time since I've recounted that. It reminded myself of the way God changed me forever. And so we need to recount the basic gospel in the way it took hold in our lives, that's Jesus prescription for us as a church, that's the main thing we're supposed to do when we get together, is to remind each other of the basic truths of the gospel that Jesus came and lived for us, died for us, and rose from the dead for us.

So we didn't have to go to hell and we could have a relationship with God forever as adopted children. And so we get together. And Jesus says when you gather, take some bread and wine and remind yourselves of the very basic, fundamental things I've done for you. You'd think we could say, well, Lord, that it's going to get boring after a while, isn't it? Same old thing over and over again. Let's do something inventive and creative and let's break away from the same old routine. But Jesus says no, remind each other of who I am and what I've done for you. That's central to who we are. And I'm very concerned that the church gets off from this.

We can turn the Christian faith into principles for living in self-help prescriptions for our lives and we pay attention to all these other things, but the risen Christ but the crucified messiah, but the Lord of Glory, who reigns over everything as central to who we are as Christians, Jesus must be preeminent and exalted. He must be explicitly affirmed in our lives. It's not on to something more inventive and so-called interesting. It's about Jesus. And so we pursue a passion for Christ by depending on Christ, for everything, for who we are in Christ.

Would you open your Bibles to X? Chapter eight. I love the Book of Acts, it brings into history God's redemptive work. In radical ways. In Acts Chapter eight, we have this. Progressive work of God as Acts one eight is being carried out and established facts when it comes to the apostles, these Jewish believers, and says this faith in Christ, you have come to understand that has taken hold and transformed you is going to spread. It's going to start in Jerusalem.

It's going to move out into Judea and then even Samaria and then to the ends of the Earth.

There's this progression and acts where we're moving from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

In some ways, Rome, where the book ends up, Luke's gospel really has been said to be a progression from Nazareth or Galilee to Jerusalem and now acts going from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth to the gentile world. This gospel that began being worked out right in the Garden of Eden, as God says, even though there's a curse and a fall, there will be a seed that comes from the woman who will crush the head of the serpent.

And we find that the seed is Jesus in this pre gospel gospel. Right. In the context of the fall in Genesis three, we see the gospel come to root now in the person of Christ, and now it's spreading. And this primary agent of bringing God's covenant promises to fruition. Israel now brings this gospel ultimately to the ends of the earth. We see the spread at Pentecost in Jerusalem, and then it moves out into Judea. And in Acts Chapter eight, we have the Samaritan Pentecost as God validates his work and the lives of the Samaritans.

Now the hated Samaritans, we see the gospel beginning to spread to the people. You would least expect it to go to these half breeds that Jews had a war with for a long time. And now we see the

gospel taking root in their lives and their understanding of God's work is being transformed. It should have come as no surprise.

Because since the beginning, the promise has been, I will be your God and you will be my people, Abraham, and all the ends of the Earth will be blessed through you. This has always had universal implications since the beginning. It should it should have come as no surprise. But now they're going through this transformation beyond the chosen people, the Jews to the ends of the Earth, the Gentiles and Samaritans.

And we have the Samaritan Pentecost in the first half of Chapter eight of X, and then we have this scene that actually gets as much attention. As massive movements in other parts of acts, it's the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch, and that's what I want to pick up our story this morning. Acts chapter a beginning, a verse twenty six. Known angel, the Lord said to Phillip Rise. Now, Phillip has led. This Samaritan movement, this evangelistic revival taking place in Samaritan country and Simon the Magician even believes.

Phillips leading this in God, says, as he's leading this massive movement of God, if there were church growth experts at the time, they would have been asking him to write books about how you grow a church in Samaria. And he would have started going on tours telling people how to

plant churches in difficult places, but God has a different plan for him now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip Ri's. And go toward the south, to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

This. Is a desert place. What about the book contracts? What about the success, the the massive thronging people? Go to a desert place. Got another agenda for you, you're going to pass on your faith to someone. We'll take it far beyond where you'll take it. Verse twenty seven. And he rose. And there was an Ethiopian. The representation in the Jewish mind, really, of the ends of the earth. The prototype of the black race to these Jewish minds, which, by the way, carried with it no racial stereotypes based on skin color or facial features.

As I studied this, I was fascinated. I thought we'd have an amazing racial reconciliation passage where Philipps able to overcome his racial prejudices. But as I read, I was fascinated to find that that was not an issue. At this time in antiquity, there was all sorts of hatred among different cultures, but based on simply skin color or facial features just wasn't a reality. So I guess we have a racial reconciliation passage here subtly, don't we?

That this didn't seem to be a problem, Herodotus says that the black race was the most beautiful and longest living of all known races at this time. And so we have yes, and so we don't have this

problem that plagues our society today here, Phillip had massive obstacles to overcome in reaching this Ethiopian, but one of them was not racial prejudice based on skin color.

It's really a rebuke to us that these old people were far more enlightened than our society in many ways. So he's an Ethiopian. We find out. Probably from. Fifteen hundred miles away, this is Sudan, this is below Egypt. This is the ends of the earth in the Jewish mind.

And we find that he was a unique. He had been castrated now Eunuch's. We're really revered people in some ways they would be put in charge of. Harrumphs They'd be put in charge of looking after the queen and we find out that this man had an important role. A court official of Ken Ducky, queen of the Ethiopians, who is in charge of all her treasures, this man had a prominent role.

He was an Ethiopian, he was a eunuch, but he had prestige in Ethiopia. He had power and status and an important role. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning seated in his chariot, which was a big deal to have a chariot. And he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the spirit said to Philip, Go over to his chariot. And join him. And listen to Phillips response. He could have said an Ethiopian. A unique. What about what's going on in Somalia? You don't you have more exciting things for me to do.

So, Philip. Ran to him. I love that. And heard him reading Isaiah the Prophet and asked, do you understand what you are reading? And he said, How can I? Unless someone guides me, what humility but beautiful humility. And he invited Phillip to come up and sit with him. Now, the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this. Like a sheep. He was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shear's is silent, so he opens not his mouth.

And it's humiliation justice was denied him, who can describe his generation for his life is taken away from the Earth. I want you to notice the amazing, providential details God is working out in orchestrating in this scene. There's an Ethiopian unit going by, Philip didn't plan on this, he didn't orchestrated he didn't put a program into place to accomplish this. God brings this man his way and he moves toward him and he's got a chariot. And if there was one passage in the Old Testament that you wanted to share the gospel out of for this man, this is the one you would have wanted him to have been reading.

And the said to Philip. About whom I ask you, does the prophet say this about himself or about someone else? Then Phillip opened his mouth and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news about Jesus, it's all about Jesus, we're pointing people to Jesus. He's the Messiah. He's

the one who's come. To bring salvation, he's the one we look to, to have our sins forgiven, to have abundant and eternal life, it's all about Jesus according to the scriptures.

And as they were going along the road, they came to some water in the eunuchs said, here's water. Oh, look at that. Another orchestrated detail by the sovereign hand of God, what prevents me from being baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Phillip, in the unit. And he baptized him. And when he came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord carried Phillip away and the unit saw him no more.

And went on his way rejoicing. But Phillip found himself as at a Zoetis, almost, it seems, miraculously. And as we pass through to preach the gospel to all the towns until he came to Syria. What a story gets half a chapter. The conversion of this one man gets half a chapter and it's in vivid detail. You know, if we were to go to X chapter twenty to twenty one, we would see that Paul sits down.

With Lou I'm sorry, Philip sits down with Luke and no doubt explains these sorts of stories to him, Luke tells his story as if he were there. Probably because he heard it firsthand from Philip, who's called the evangelist in Chapter twenty one that's become his name, his nickname, you know, Philip the Evangelist, and he's got daughters who have a powerful, prophetic ministry.

And 20 years later, Luke sits down with Phillip and no doubt hears the story and Luke gives it to us and vivid Technicolor.

What we have here is this movement and acts where it really acts, one aid has now come to a beautiful beginning of being completed. As this Ethiopian is reached, we see the spirit of God working fundamentally through the chosen people of Israel. But now it's spreading around the world. And that's what God wants us to realize, that his spirit is not bound to a particular people anymore as it was as God was working out his messianic covenant promises through Israel.

Now it's spreading to the world to more and more amazing degrees. It's it's now everywhere, it's universal, it's not limited to a place for particular people now, and one of our main functions as God's people is to be that conduit, that agent of spreading God's gospel is universal spirit led spirit and proud message to a lost and dying world. The spirit is here now, now available to the world to have him change it. It's like my friend Jeff has a dear little children in Connecticut.

And when we go back to Connecticut during the summer, sometimes where we're from and one of the things we miss most about living in Connecticut is, is weather, real weather, you know. Well, you know, they say in New England, if you don't like the weather, just wait a few minutes.

It's changing all the time and it's exciting and and it rains a lot and real and it's dramatic. There's some drama in weather.

You know, here, the weather. Men and women have to dress like floozies and movie stars to get any attention, you know, and because they know everything to do right. The weather is about the same as usual, is what they say. And and so I remember when we came to Biola new these New Englanders and people living in Chicago came. And one of our first weeks here, we got an e-mail memo. From H.R.. About rain safety tips.

Things like when walking into public buildings realize puddles may be forming on the entrance to walk on the balls of your feet so as to not slip, what in the world is that all about? And roads will be slick. We send it to all our friends back home so they could have a big laugh. It was great. But when we were home last summer with our friends, the BASKIS and their kids wanted to go to the neighbor's pool to go swimming, and every time we'd get them ready, they get their towels. You know what it's like to get three little kids ready. And Zach and Anna and their friend was we're all going to go and they got all their stuff and they're going to go.

And just as we would go, a thunder and lightning storm would start. And you can't go swimming. It's just thunder, lightning storms. So we go. They go, oh, no. And we say, well, we

can't go. So we go back. And then it would clear and say, can we go? Can we go? And we'd say, OK, all right, we can go. And then it would start again.

And they wanted to go swimming in the pool and it was a muggy day and they just there were so sad and three times that happened.

We were going to go swimming and go to this pool and they couldn't go and I mean, it's buckets of rain just and we're standing on the front porch. These kids are like and their father says something brilliant.

He said, you know what I just realized? Kids. You want to go swimming in the pool at the neighbors? It's just water. And you know what? The water is not limited to the pool right now. It's everywhere. Why don't you go run and enjoy the water in this torrential downpour and the kids are like.

We didn't think that and guys. Here they are, look. Look at them, can you see them? That's right, after Jeff let him go off the front porch and they're going. And they're running around and what I want you to know is this is what the spirit of God is doing, an acts right here. He's everywhere.

He's not located in any particular place anymore. The spirit is here. That's the message of X right here. And we can be right.

Is that great? Look at him. There's a beautiful and that's what we need to realize, that the spirit is accessible, available, powerful, real here and acts around the world. He's at work. And, you know, as a faculty member here, as much as I love you guys in teaching here, I hear about the things going around and around the world where the spirit of God is at work. And at times I'm a little bit sad.

God's called me not to be a Marine on the front lines where the spirit is just bustin loose. And if I don't believe that my role here, our role here can in some way influence you guys to go those places where the spirit so at work and moving powerfully, not that he doesn't want to do it here. And I pray he does, but he's at work all over the world, not just here in the spirit of crisis here. Let's enjoy that.

Let's celebrate that like the Busca kids do. In this Ethiopian eunuch is part of this sweeping movement of the spirit of God, and guys realize he has two strikes against them, he's a God, Ferer. He can't even be a proselyte, somebody who can actually take part in the Jewish

observances. He's a unique and Deuteronomy says no eunuch will be allowed in the temple court. A unit shall never enter the assembly of the Lord. Do not enter their Deuteronomy.

Twenty three one. He's a gentile. Two huge strikes against him. But somehow he finds himself drawn to the God of Israel, it says he's going back from Jerusalem, where he traveled maybe fifteen hundred miles to worship God, even though he couldn't get even close to the worship area. This gentile, this unit who does not have access in the Old Testament context goes anyway, he's drawn to God. And that just made me think of Terry Baska, the mother of these children who is a godly woman.

And even though her parents didn't raise her to go to church and to seek the things have got something to her. Love to hear stories of the spirit of God, in spite of parents who even resist the work of the gospel in their kids lives. The kids are drawn. Some of you have that story. We're you know, most Christian parents are dragging their kids to church, and you hear these stories of these kids raised in non Christian homes who are just drawn to the things of God.

I know some of you have that story. I love that powerful message of God's work in our lives in spite of a lack of human circumstances to lead us to that. And we have this work in this man's life, I love this Ethiopian, I can't wait to meet him in his restored state in heaven. He can't even

be circumcised, he's he's a unique he's he's disfigured his body, and that's distasteful to God. Outlaws him from this, but he has hope and he goes anyway, and he's a God fearing.

And he's on his way back to Jerusalem, maybe thinking about, oh, what does this mean for me to be drawn to the God of Israel so that I will get in my chariot and travel all these miles to seek him, even though I can't even have access right now?

And here comes Philip. And Philip brings in the message of this implication of this universal spread of the gospel that applies to the Ethiopian eunuch and he's reading from Isaiah, Where did this man find hope? Maybe it was in some sixty eight thirty one where we hear about the gospel reaching out as far as Khush, Old Testament, Ethiopia. Maybe he got hope from some eighty seven three where Bush is held up again is a place where the Covenant promises of God will even reach.

Maybe he found hope right from this immediate context, if I say. Fifty three, let's go there. I say a fifty three is one massive invitation for wicked people to come to God and ask for forgiveness and receive it. What a perfect passage for this man who didn't have much hope, but somehow was drawn to the God of Israel. I said, fifty three begins, who is believed, what they heard from us and to whom is the arm of the Lord been revealed, and then it goes on with this messianic

promise, talking about this one who is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and equated with grief.

No doubt the Ethiopian eunuch can relate to the suffering servant. For seven, he was oppressed and he was afflicted. And he opened his mouth like a lamb that has led to the slaughter and this is the passage he and Philip read together. But listen to verse 10. It was the will of the Lord to crush him, he has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days, the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand, out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge, so the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, it's one big invitation. Maybe he found encouragement also from the very next chapter. As he opened his scroll a little further and read seeing old Beran one. Who did not bear? Break forth into singing and cry aloud you who have not been in labor. For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married, says the Lord.

This man who bore no children biologically of his own, maybe he finds hope. In the fruitfulness. In the offspring of the Baron one. That Isaiah promises. Will bear children. Maybe if we just go to the next chapter, he found hope there. I see a 50 five come everyone who thirsts come to the

waters and he who has no money come by and eat. Again, it's a big invitation to come and no God look a first five.

Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, maybe it's Ethiopia. And the nation that did not know you so run to you because of the Lord, your God and of the holy one of Israel, for he has glorified you seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way in the unrighteous man, his thoughts, let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon abundantly not in a miserly way, but abundantly overflowing like Niagara Falls.

Pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and they have to guide us to affirm his incomprehensibility in light of this overwhelming grace. Oh, did he find hope there? And God's abundant pardon. Well, we find after he comes to Christ, he has the very same response verse 12 says he will have for you shall go out and joy and be led force in peace, the mountains in the hills before you shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Joyful rejoicing is what he experiences. And would all people who come to know the saving power of God experience, maybe he found hope in chapter fifty six.

Give us three. Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say the Lord will surely separate me from his people and let not the.

Let not eunuchs say. Behold, I'm a dry tree. Four, thus, says the Lord, to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath to choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant. I will give in my house and within my walls. Monument and a name. Better than sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants.

Everyone who keeps my Sabbath and is not profane and holds fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain. And make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their bird offerings in their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar for my house. They'll be called the House of Prayer for all people. Did you hear that? Even Ethiopian Unix and even undeserving fist shaking rebels like you.

Will receive the abundant pardon of God when you simply go to him and ask for forgiveness. And you will be filled with joy, this is the joy of the Lord, it doesn't come through all the other blessings that he sometimes heaps upon us. This is the fundamental blessing of the Lord that

brings the joy of the Lord that this Ethiopian unique experiences in our passage and then all people who know the salvation of our God and Jesus Christ experience.

This is the best news you'll ever hear in the world. Say the Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered. Do you think he found hope in these promises, in this passage? I think he did. And I think we need to find hope when we feel like we can never approach God. We think about his promises, his covenant and the finished work of Jesus Christ, and we rejoice that we are now called Children of God.

And that will never change.

That's the gospel, and that's what I want us to think about this morning, the gospel. That's the message of Philip when he goes to the Ethiopian, that's the message of the apostles when they are establishing the church in the New Testament. That's our message today. It never changes. Jesus is the message from the scriptures like on the road to a mass. Jesus is the messiah for the nations, the suffering servant. The Messiah is gentle and humble and compassionate.

And he's the risen reigning son of man who will come in the clouds with glory, with an everlasting dominion that will never fade, who will receive glory and worship and honor is the suffering servant and the reigning son of man brought together in one person. How do you bring these messianic concepts in the Old Testament together except in Jesus? And he does beautifully and perfectly, and he is available to all who will repent and turn to him. And we see in our passage the outcaste.

Becomes a priest. A priest. See, all the Jews couldn't even go into the holy of holies. It's just the priests who could approach this sacred area, those who are set apart for God and service before the altar. And now we find in the New Testament that God has made a kingdom of priests were all priests and the outcasts. The unit becomes a priest. Amazing. You can see why it took a while for these Jewish apostles to get this.

That units are now going into the holy of holies before the throne of God, boldly and confidently covered in the blood of Christ. It's astounding. It's astounding, and he brings salvation to us, and Irenaeus tells us that this Ethiopian eunuch brings the gospel to Africa. He is the pioneer missionary to Africa. Hey, when God brings you into the wilderness rather than the plot populated supposedly successful areas of ministry. Believe he wants to use you powerfully, well beyond your wildest dreams.

If we looked at the next passage. We would see Paul's conversion. Want to talk about an unexpected conversion, you want to talk about a guy you would think would never come to Christ, you don't get one more radical than Paul. We've got to read through this passage. It's no coincidence Luke stacks them right next to each other. As the work of God increases persecution against the work of God, increases oppression does vishna a verse one of Chapter nine.

We've got to read Paul's conversion. But Saul still breathing threats. Acts 9:1 but Saul still breathing threats, he's been at it a while now. Like since. Add thirty three. Twenty years later here. But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogue at Damascus. So that if he found any belonging to the way men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem wasn't enough that he persecute Christians in Jerusalem.

He went looking for him one hundred and fifty miles away in Damascus from Jerusalem. He was on a mission. His mission is about to change. He's arrested before he can arrest anybody else. Now, as he went on his way, he approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul.

Why are you persecuting me? And he said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus. Whom you are persecuting. But Ri's. And enter the city and you will be told what you were to do. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, this wasn't just an internal subjective experience they saw it to. From hearing the voice and seeing no one saw Rose from the ground, and although his eyes were open, he saw nothing.

So they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. And for three days he was without sight and neither eat nor drink.

Paul, has his life changed here, a hostile enemy of God and aggressive opposition to the things of God with a zeal for terror, without knowledge, with no place for a crucified divine messiah, or leaving temple worship in the law and allowing Jesus to fulfill that for him. He had no categories for this. And so he's a zealous opponent of the gospel. So what he says and acts twenty six, I punish them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme and enraging fury against them. I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

The last thing Paul intended to become was a Christian. And the last thing you intended to become was a Christian until God moved in. Romans three says this, The words of Paul, none is righteous, no, not one, no one understands. No one seeks God. All have turned aside together.

They have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. And we can never understand and appreciate the depth of God's forgiveness unless we appreciate and understand the depth of our human sin and depravity and rebellion against God.

No one has ever had a high view of sin who does not have a high view of God. We need to see sin for what it is. And to do that, we must see God for who he is. And we don't want to see sin for what it is and all of its blackness and rebellion against God. So we call it all sorts of other things. It's sin and rebellion toward God, it's the human condition before God moves in and changes us.

There's no one righteous, no, not one, and we need to come to grips with the depth of our sin, we can't avoid it if we avoid it will never come to grips with the depth of God's love and forgiveness for us. We have some other friends who have a little boy named Joe and Kim Winters, godly people have raised their children to know the Lord and Nate and Kim put Joe in kindergarten.

A little while ago, I was talking to Kim on the phone and she said, you know, we're going to home school. Joe for a while said he just started. She said, I know, but we're going to just homeschool them for a while, you know, he I said what happened? He said he didn't really have attacked and sharing his faith. We'd hoped he would by now. And I said, Kim, what happened,

she said, oh, we had at a parent teacher conference and they all think we're crazy at the school now.

So what do you do? She said, well, he asked his teacher if she loved Jesus. And she said, oh, no, I don't believe in Jesus. And Joe said, Oh. That means. You're an enemy of God. Joe's being home schooled now. And he's probably wondering why. I just told the truth, mom. By the way, his middle name is Michael. This profit from the Old Testament, who is apparently brought out of prison for saying things the king never wants to hear, and they say, tell us, you know, tell us, Makhaya, should we go to war or not as a kite?

And I are wondering and he makes fun of them first and they says, what do you really mean? He says, You're going down, king, send them back to prison. You know, that's Joe's middle name. And I said the name of my kite. What do you expect him seriously?

You know, in my case, being led back to prison and he says, I can only say what the Lord tells me to say. I mean, what do you expect, right, guys? This is the truth. This is the truth. We are rebels before God, if you put Paul in a different category, bro. Wow. Paul could come to Christ. I guess anybody can. No, don't do that. Paul didn't need Jesus to die for him any more than you did, by the way, neither does Osama bin Laden. And Mother Teresa didn't need to die any less.

Then you do. It's about radical grace, grace in your face, we can't preach it enough. We just can't preach it enough. And Jesus confronts Saul with his blinding glory to give him a glimpse of who he is and have him reorient his entire perspective on life.

There's a great piece of art. Well, that's not it. Where am I? I went to first. We go back, here we go. Great piece of art of Paul being blinded with this this glory of Christ blinding glory. We find out in Paul's later recounting of this and acts that it's at noon day that he's knocked down by this blinding light. It's in the middle of the day in the Mediterranean where the sun is pumping down at Paul and a light comes that's blinding well beyond the light of the sun. And it's so blinding, it knocked him down. Listen to Deuteronomy, twenty eight, twenty eight, talking about the judgment of God. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noon day as the blind grope in darkness.

And you shall not prosper in your ways and you should be only oppressed and robbed continually and there should be no one to help you, the judgment of God comes in. It's this overwhelming realization of who he is and that you've been terribly wrong. And that's what Paul had to come to realize. He had to revise his whole estimate of Jesus, his whole understanding of the Messiah in the Kingdom of God. He no doubt understood Jesus. He was an apologist opposed to him.

He probably knew about the Christian gospel quite well. He didn't believe it until now, but he knew it. And he now had to say it's true. And the bottom line in its truth is that Jesus is alive, he's alive. And now there's no doubt that the gospels, true, his ministry, his teaching, his person has been vindicated and affirmed by God himself and raising him from the dead. Jesus is alive. And he's met Paul on the road to Damascus. And now he's got to admit I've been terribly wrong and I need to reorient everything. And he's now called to a life of discipleship and in service and as an ambassador and suffering.

That's what Jesus promises for him. And he goes to Damascus, not the way he expected to go, but he goes. And this encounter brings a radical life change. A call to the lordship of Christ. Just quickly want to point out this amazing interaction we have with Anthony. First 10, now there was a disciple. A Damascus. Neimann Indicus. Lord said two men of vision and a nice. And he said, Here I am, Lord. And the Lord said to them, rise and go to the street called straight. OK, got it. Here it is, guys, here's a street called Street. It's still there. Damascus, one of the oldest cities in the entire world, this is the street called straight.

OK, I know where that is, I live right near it, Lord, I can do that whatever you want. And at the house of Judas, I know Judas, I know Judas is right down the road. Look for a man of Tarsus got

Godet. Named. Saul. Uh. Lord. For behold, he's praying. And he's seen a vision, a man named Denias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

Lord. But an answered lord. I've heard from many about this man. How much evil he has done? To your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name Lord. He's been a murdering, persecuting whirlwind. Since this whole thing started. Lord, do you realize that there are widows in Damascus because of this guy? Realize there are kids running around the streets of Damascus who don't have fathers because of him.

He's one of the most dangerous persons I can think of. You want me to go see Lord? Are you sure? But the Lord said to him, verse 15, go. For he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer. For the sake of my name. And just like Phillip. So in a nice departed. I don't know what his self talk was like in the way over to the house.

Saul. Saul. Prain. God's chosen instrument. I hate. I hate his guts. I've never even met him, and I just wish I could bring his neck. He's been our worst enemy, so. Oh, I know I needed Jesus, but. So really needs. I know God changed my heart, but how can he change Saul's art? So. But obviously something happens and and nice enough for him to walk in. Go over to.

His hands on him. He was blind, he couldn't see Canonizes face of compassion and acceptance, he had to put his hands on him to communicate that. And he said. Brother. Imagine if those are the first words Paul ever heard out of the mouth of a Christian. Brother Saul. The Lord Jesus. Who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me. So that you may regain your sight. And be filled with the Holy Spirit, I'm coming to give you your physical sight back, Paul, because.

You're gaining spiritual site. And immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose was baptized. And taking food, he was strengthened, he comes to Damascus and he says, no, I don't want to I don't want to eat, I don't want to drink. I just need to think. I just need to pray. Everything's been turned upside down. And here this brother comes and he says, Brother Saul, and he welcomes him into the family of God, the murderer, the persecutor.

Becomes the proclaim. And the ambassador. In the brother. So all is welcomed into the way. And God, sovereign, powerful grace marches on. And the response is deep gratitude, listen to Paul and first, Timothy one, I thank God who has given me strength. Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, so I formerly was a blasphemer persecutor, an insular opponent, but I receive mercy because I had acted ignorantly and unbelief and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came in the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. But I receive mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who are to believe in him for eternal life, to the king of kings, immortal, invisible, the only God, the honor and glory, forever and ever. And is it any wonder that Paul breaks into spontaneous praise after recounting what Jesus has done for him?

Or don't get used to what Jesus has done for you? Some of you've known it for 20 years. Don't get used to it. Be overwhelmed by the grace of God in your life. Cultivate a heart of profound gratitude for the simple gospel. Jesus loves me. This I know. And he died for me so I could know him and be forgiven. This is the Gospel. God adopts a out of our depraved, sinful condition, it's all grace, all we deserve.

Yes, even in this entitlement age we live in where every day you get mail telling you you're not getting what you deserve. And when someone tells you you're not getting what you deserve, you should say glory be to God. Because all I deserve is hell. All I deserve is judgment, and by his grace, I have a I have sonship, I have forgiveness. You were a child of God, you haven't earned it, you couldn't any way, and it'll never change. And it's not based on your daily feelings or your daily behavior.

It's based on the overflow, overflowing grace of God, Paul says in Ephesians one, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless in him. In love predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, and it is four by grace, he says in Chapter two. You've been saved. It's not of yourselves that no one can boast.

We have every spiritual blessing in Christ, we lack nothing. Now, before him, we deserve nothing. And now we have everything in God's eyes. You are right, Jesus Christ himself. And it's not just enough righteousness to get you into heaven. It's the righteousness is the son of God. And you've now been swept up into this entire Trinitarian love between father, son and spirit that we share now is partakers of the divine nature. Second Corinthians five 16.

Paul says, For our sake, he made him who knew no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Christ has done it. You're totally identified with him now through faith in him, and Martin Luther puts it this way. Therefore, now, with confidence, a man can boast in Christ and say Mine are Christ living, doing and speaking his suffering and dying mine as much as if I had lived and spoken and suffered and died as he did, just as the bridegroom possesses all that his his brides and she all that is his for the to have all things in common because they are one flesh.

So Christ and his church are one spirit. Do you want self esteem. No. You want Christ esteem. That's where our esteem comes from. Our glory comes from being identified with him. You know the bumper sticker that says Christians aren't perfect, they're just forgiving. I get the point. But I just think it robs the gospel of its wonderful, overwhelming power. I'm not just forgiven. Don't hurt me. I want to get a big. We had this Ford deltoid eighty six, Donna's father gave it to her and I stole it and we drove it around and it was this huge cars called the Blue Glider.

They called it. I want to get a big old bumper sticker on the back of a bus or a Ford that says Christians aren't just forgiving. They're holy and blameless and adopted and righteous in the sight of God and have an eternal life in an abundant life for all to share, and not that be a bumper sticker. Take a big old car. But that's our mentality we've got to have. We're justified and

righteous and safe. And we've been raised with Christ said Free Children of God, joint heirs with Christ made alive together with him.

And one of the greatest lies of Satan is that it's not really finished, even though Jesus said it was you are a child of the king, you know, it's like a symbol at the end of the Lion King that you have probably watched five million times, drove your parents crazy, right again. Remember, the kingdom's gone, right, and Scar comes in and it's run overrun with hyenas and it turns black and white. And what's the key scene in the movie?

He cashes in his royal identity and he goes and limps away because he thinks he was responsible for his father's death. And remember, mafiosa comes he looks in the water and he sees his reflection and symbolizes reflection and what is. James Earl Jones say. He says. Remember who you are, right? That's it when you start to wonder if you're accepted in Christ, if you're forgiven, if you're blameless in this sight, remember who you are. James Earl Jones is a great choice for that voice.

Go with it. That's the truth. Listen to what Spurgeon says. I know what the devil will say to you. He will say that you're a sinner. Tell him, you know you are. But for all that, you are justified, he will tell you of the greatness of your sin, tell him of the greatness of Christ's righteousness, he

will tell you of all your mishaps and your backsliding and your offenses and your wanderings. Tell him and tell your own conscience that you know all that, but that Jesus Christ came to save sinners and that although your sin be great, Christ is quite able to put it all away.

That's the gospel in what we're called to do is live according to what we've already attained in Christ. And our lives in many ways, as Christians are fundamentally getting the gospel better and better. And was pastor. We had a man in his church. Who is battling deep sin in his life? And he committed one of the most horrible sins you can commit. Exposed himself to some kids in a playground. And he got caught. An arrested. He went to jail.

When he got out of jail, he submitted himself. To the discipline process and the restoration process that his church that the leaders of his church put into place for him.

And for two years, he went through this process of counseling and discipline. And accountability. And teaching and prayer. And after this two year process, he was he was declared to be in a good place. Is accepted and affirmed in the church and the people in the church acknowledge this. Except for one person. The man. He just couldn't quite get it into his head that it could ever be forgiven. And then even though the people of God and the elders in his church

have said, you're forgiven, you're accepted, you're part of the fold, the grace of God can take care of this without a problem.

God's forgiveness is exhaustive and overflowing. There aren't some sense he doesn't forgive, you're forgiven, and he couldn't quite get it in his head. In this past road, watch this man slip into church after it started every Sunday. And sit in the very last seat in the very last row of the balcony. And every week. About 15 minutes before the service is over, he'd get up and he'd slip out. So you have to look at anything but.

Any time they'd have communion right before communion would start and get up and leave. Month after month, this pastor watched him get up and leave. And he tell him, you don't have to do that. You're forgiven. And after a while, this pastor just couldn't take it anymore. And as they started to serve communion one week, he watched the man get up and leave. The spirit of God moved in this pastor's heart and he went over and grab some bread.

Two pieces. And he grabbed two cups. And he started after the guy. By the time he caught up to him, he was going out the front door. And he turned around and he saw this pastor coming with bread and wine and. He started to run. The pastor took off after him. Imagine what that looked

like if you drove by. He finally caught up to him and literally cornered him in an alley. And he went up to this broken man.

And he said, take it. And he said, I can't. I'm not worthy. And the pastor said, neither am I. None of us are take it. And broken Cinar. And broken Sentner. Shared communion. And an Ali. Do you think you are beyond God's exhaustive forgiveness? You know, people in your life who you feel like are beyond exhausted forgiveness, it may be a child abuser. You may have been that child. I know it seems impossible.

But forgiveness flowing from our own hearts always starts with the realization of how completely and overwhelmingly and amazingly we've been forgiven. Well, let's claim our inheritance. Let's be gospel grounded, sanctified, gospel driven people in our sanctification, let's pursue a passion for Christ but grounded in Christ, utterly dependent upon Christ. Heavenly Father. Would you help us to get the gospel? By your spirit. For our good. And for your glory.

[End of Recording].