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Title: A Wretch Like Me-But Now I See

Kevin McSpadden, Garden Gathering, 7/13/25

My name is Kevin McSpadden, if I haven't met you. I am blessed to be part of the leadership team here at the Garden. As you're well aware, I smash those drums every Sunday in His name and in His honor. It is my privilege to get to do that. On a morning like today, I hope that you're aware that He loves you. I know that in churches sometimes, that "God really loves you," *phrase* can be said and not meant. But today, I'm hoping that you're experiencing in a tangible way, the fact that He actually, tangibly, physically, ridiculously, outrageously, more than you can possibly imagine, loves you personally.

I'm filling in this morning as Brandy and Grant are *vacationing* in the mountains. They invited me, and I am honored to get to stand here today to honor Jesus with you. I've called what I'm bringing this morning, "A Wretch Like Me-But Now I See." Some people in this room are like, "I know where that comes from." We're going to get to that. But, I'm hoping that today that I can add to your understanding of where that song came from. I'm hoping that by the time you walk out the door today, that you can do one of two things. That you can find yourself humbled in the sight of God, and more aware of just how much He actually does love you, and how much you personally mean to Him. That's the goal today.

"We thank you Lord that you do truly love us. That you chose each and every person, who believes in you, to be redeemed, set free, healed, delivered, adopted, and to bear your name. You're not ashamed of us. *We are* so thankful that you're so good. That you could look at a wretch like me and love me with everything that you are. Bring forth your word today with power and conviction, Lord. For your glory and for your name's sake, amen."

I'm going to begin in Ephesians chapter two. This is to kind of set the background, *and* the foundation, if you will, for what we're going to talk about the rest of today.

Ephesians 2:1-10 NKJV

This is your story. If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, this is your story. It's put very beautifully and powerfully in this passage. Now, everybody say the next two words with me. Say, "but God." This is our story. We were lost, we were dead, and we were blind. But God, because of His love, which He loved us even when we were in that state, He made us alive together. He saved us through His grace, when we believed in Him as Lord and Savior. Not only that, that would have been enough, that would have been good, right there. You don't have to go to hell anymore.

Praise God for that. But not only that, it says that He wants to put us on display as measures of His kindness. *God says*, "I want to show everybody this is how kind and how good I can be, because of what I'm going to do in your life and through your life. I'm going to give you more than you would have ever thought to ask. I'm going to bless you more than you thought you were worth. I'm going to call you My son. I'm going to fill you with My Holy Spirit. I'm going to put My power in you, and you're going to go build My kingdom. You're My workmanship. I've prepared good works for you, and you get to go live in it. Those things that light your heart on fire, I put that there. Now go and do it.

Go and build My kingdom on this planet. Because God is powerful enough that He could snap His fingers if He wanted anything to happen. The snap of His fingers is enough for that. But what He chose, in His goodness and His kindness, is to say, "I want to put My glory on display

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through vessels like this guy right here. I want to put My glory on display, because I don't have to do it Myself. I'll send the ones that I save. I'll send those people who were dead and blind. I have made them alive. I'll send those. I'll show you how powerful I am, because even the people who believe in Me will build My kingdom. They'll do what I can do." That's our story.

Today, the main thing I want us to focus on is that all of that is by His grace. We could read books. We could write books. We could talk for hours and years upon His grace. It's one of those things that can be tricky to define it exactly, because His grace means so many things. It includes so many things. His grace and His kindness, are they exactly the same? Not necessarily, but they're joined together, His grace and His goodness, His grace and His forgiveness, and His grace and our salvation. But, if I were to give it to you point blank, God's grace is, He didn't give me what I deserved. Instead of that, He gave me what I didn't deserve. I was deserving of hell, death and the grave. That's what I deserved. He didn't give me that. In His grace, He gave me His sonship, His adoption, He sealed me forever with His Holy Spirit, and gave me an eternal destiny with Him forever. I didn't deserve that, but He gave it to me anyway. His grace is His power for me to do what I can't do. His grace is to take what looks impossible and make it possible. That's the shortest definition I can give you of grace. So, we're not here till seven o'clock this evening. *I'm* barely on the introduction.

It's by His grace that we've been saved through faith. So, to bring it back around to why I called this, "A Wretch Like Me-But Now I See." *It's a line* from one of the most incredible songs that we love to sing, and you're familiar with it. You can probably sing it with me.

"Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see."

It touches us to this day, even though it was written in the 1700s. You know, there's an anointing on that song, that I believe will last until Jesus comes back. People hear that song and think, "Wow, it really is amazing that God would save a wretch like me." But, I want to take a minute, and I want us to consider what that really means. To say that, "It is God's amazing grace," and what it means to say, "He saved a wretch like me."

Let me preface this. If I'm calling you a wretch this morning, understand, I'm calling me a wretch first. I'm saying this is who we were. This is the heartbeat here. It's not, "Man, I'm terrible." No, it's, "Man, I was terrible." God is in the process of doing a work in me to make me not only not terrible, but more like Him. That's what He's doing. Okay? Don't internalize this and be like, "Man, that dude spent half the morning calling me a terrible person." That's not the point.

According to Merriam Webster's online dictionary, to amaze means, "to fill with wonder, to astound." How many of you use the word, "astound," on a daily basis? "I am astounded." That's a pretty exceptional word. Let me finish the definition. "In an old way of looking at it, can mean to "bewilder, or to perplex." We're in the western, modern world. We have cheapened some words, and amazing is one of those. We say, "Man, these tacos are amazing." Are you astounded at them? You ate the taco and suddenly you can't function for the next five minutes? Is that what you're saying? I don't know? I get it, and I'm guilty of it, too.

But to say, "It's amazing grace," is to say it's the kind of grace that is "difficult to get your head around. It's perplexing. It's bewildering." You think, "Well, I thought the grace of God is a good thing." It is. But, what we're going to see is, that the fact that God chose His grace for us can be a bewildering, astounding fact. When we consider where we came from and where He's taking us, here's what that will do for you. If we can keep a hold of that, it'll keep you humble in His presence and make you thankful. Also, it will remind you every day how much you're loved.

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So, it's amazing, astounding, perplexing, bewildering grace that's difficult to even comprehend, but it's true. What did it do? It saved a wretch like me.

Well, what is a wretch? A wretch, according to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, "is a base, despicable or vile person." So, the song was written by a man who was amazed at the grace of God, that would save a vile, despicable human being like him. Who was this guy? Why did he think so little of himself and so much of God's grace? Well, how many of you have ever heard the story of the man who wrote the song, Amazing Grace? I'm just curious to know. Some of us have, but, a lot of us haven't. Good, history lesson time. All right? His name was John Newton. John Newton was a holy and pious man who lived a life of delight before the Lord, the end. No, that was not who he was at all.

John Newton was a rebellious, foul mouthed, ugly man. He lived a life like someone those shirts that say "Mama Tried," are about. His parents tried to raise him in the faith, and he was having none of it. As a young man, his parents finally said, "Go get a job as a sailor." If you ever heard the expression, "cusses like a sailor." He was so bad that even by sailors standards, they would say, "You need to tone it down a little bit." He was rebellious, insubordinate, and liked to play ugly tricks on people. He would just cuss them up one side and down the other. His captain finally said, "We have to get rid of this guy." So, they found a British sailing vessel, and they basically pressed him into service in the Royal Navy, thinking, "We're going to straighten this dude up." Well, that didn't work either. He was on the British Navy ship for a period of time, and even that captain was like, "Look, I'm either going to hang you or I'm going to get you off my boat." That's how bad this man was. That's how rotten he was in his core. What eventually happened is when out on the sea again, they found a slave trading vessel. Typically staffed by the worst human beings on the planet, and that was where he fit in, on a slave trading vessel. For the next years of his life, he was a slaver. His job was to take captured Africans and sell them into servanthood for the rest of their lives. He was happy about it. Making the money, doing the thing, and treating human beings like trash. That's the person who wrote, "Amazing Grace."

Interestingly, he had supposedly converted, gotten saved, you might say, on multiple occasions. "All right, Lord, I'm ready to give my life to you." Well, that didn't last. Convert, and then recant. That was the pattern of his life. Until, while he was a slave trader on an ocean vessel in the middle of a storm, his boat was shattered to bits. He was clinging to a board with several of his shipmates. In that moment when this vile, based, despicable human being was clinging to life in the middle of the ocean, he said a simple prayer. He said, "Lord, have mercy on us." In that moment, that prayer out of his heart touched the Lord. He said, "I will." Miraculously, John Newton survived. That was when he became a dedicated, committed follower of Jesus Christ. He actually went on to become a clergyman. That's the person that you now know wrote, "Amazing Grace." That's a little bit of the background of the person.

One of the things that John Newton did with his life was, because he understood what it took for God to get through to his heart, he made it his mission to go to the hardest, most vile, most despicable people. He said, "I want to break through to those hearts, because I was one of them. If there's anybody who can talk to those people, you're looking at him." That was the way he understood himself. His mission in life *became*, "I want to preach about the grace of God. I want to show them what God can do with my own testimony. Tell them straight up, "If He'll save me, He'll save you." Kind of like Paul, who said, "Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief." That was Paul's testimony. I'm the worst one you can think of. Look at me. The same guy who wrote, "But God, who was rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses." So, the same heartbeat, you get that? John Newton, the former slave owner who became a clergyman, whose mission in life was, "I want to break the hearts of the hardest hearted, so that they'll know the love of God."

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Now what he did was he worked with a poet named William Cowper, who wrote a lot of great poetry and several very famous hymns. John Newton would go to William Cowper, and he would talk through his message and say, "Now, let's work and create a hymn that can be sung to undergird and support the message that I'm about to bring." I want to read you some of the sermon that John Newton preached on the day that Amazing Grace was first sung. Can I do that? I'm going to do that. This is what John Newton preached on the day that he first presented this hymn that we all know and love.

He said, "Who am I?" This question should be always upon our mind. "Who am I? What was I when the Lord began to manifest His purposes of love? This was often inculcated, that means pressed upon or taught upon Israel. "Thou shalt remember, look unto the pit from which we were taken. Lord, what is man? At that time, we were number one, miserable, shut up under the law in unbelief. When must have been the event had the Lord left us there. After a few years spent in vanity, we must have sunk to rise no more. Number two, we were rebellious, blinded by the god of this world. We had not so much a desire of deliverance. Instead of desiring the Lord's help, we breathed the spirit of defiance against Him. His mercy came to us not only undeserved but undesired. Yea, few of us but resisted His calls, and when He knocked at the door of our hearts endeavored to shut Him out, until He overcame us by the power of His grace. Number three, it was the Lord against whom we sinned who showed us mercy. He needed not. What just cause of admiration that He should appoint such salvation in such a way in favor of such helpless, worthless creatures?"

That's a piece of the sermon that John Newton preached on New Year's Day, 1773. Amazing grace, you can hear his heart. Think about what we were when God got a hold of us. We were miserable. We were rebelling against Him. He didn't need anything that I could give Him, but He chose me anyway. That's what he says. What just cause of admiration that He should appoint such salvation in favor of such helpless, worthless creatures like me?

Now, a side note, please do not walk out of this room today having only heard helpless, worthless me. That is not who you are. You can measure how much something is worth by how much somebody is willing to pay for it. Can I tell you what He paid for you? He left His kingdom. Jesus did. Where He was, is, and still remains God. But He gave it up, and He put on our weaknesses, for a time. Setting aside His God like nature, so He could come and live like you and me. He died a horrible, gruesome, physical death on the cross. While also surrounded by the worst spiritual beings you can think of, and taking their mockery and whatever ugly things they were saying about Him. He descended to hell, defeated hell, and defeated the grave. His blood, He gave all of it. If you want to know what you're worth, that's what you're worth. That's what somebody already paid for you. So, don't lose sight of the heartbeat here.

What was I? I was dead, sinful, and destined for hell. But, who am I now? I'm a son and a saint. I have purpose. I have destiny. There's a call on my life. I'm filled with His Holy Spirit, and with His power. I'm covered by His blood, and filled with His grace. I'm a vessel of good works. This is who I am now. So, who was I? It keeps me humble. Who Am I? That makes me feel His love for me. That's important.

I just felt like, you should know who it is that's preaching to you today about this. Let's just consider this for a second. What if you took Jesus out of my life? What if you took Holy Spirit out of this man's life? Who would I be? Let me tell you who I'd be. I'd be selfish, childish, and petty. I would use my words to very subtly manipulate you or even cut you. I used to say proudly, "I can use my words like a razor blade. I can cut you without you even knowing it." I would say that. I could think it was a good thing. Some of y'all are looking at me like, "What is

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wrong with you?" I know, that's the point. Deceitful and lustful, this is who I am if you take Jesus out of me. Praise God, you can't take Jesus out of me. He's in me forever, and He's not going anywhere. But that's who I was at sixteen, or twenty. When I think about the person I was when I was twenty, I don't like that guy. I'm thankful that the Lord is nailing that guy in the grave and making me to be more like Him. That's my story. That's who I was.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the love that He loved me with, even when I was like that, gave me something better." That's what we want to understand today. We have to remember that's where I came from. That's what keeps me humble. At the same time, I don't want to go on believing that's who I'm still going to be. That's just as dishonoring as to say to Him, "Well, I didn't really need you God." That was just as dishonoring for me to go on saying, "Well, I'm just a vile, ugly, battle, worthless sinner.

I was sitting as a guest in a Sunday school class in a denomination that highly focuses on the sinner saved by grace part of the equation. This man, who was an older gentleman, who I'm certain, knows Jesus in truth and has walked with Jesus for the better part of five decades. He stood at the pulpit in that Sunday school room and said, "Well, you know me, I'm still just a sinner. I'm still worthless. I'm still no good." It was all I could do to not say, "Then get saved!" Not to criticize him, but, "Look, man, if you've been walking for walking with Jesus for 50 years, and that's who you still are, then you're missing something." That's not to say that we're all perfect. If we were, we would not be here, correct? But, if 50 years into your walk, you're still saying, "Well, I'm just a worthless, vile sinner," open up your Bible and look at what it says. Because, that's not what it says about you. That's not who you are. That's not who you are anymore. You're not perfect, right, correct? You still sin sometimes, but you're not characterized by that sin anymore. I'll prove it to you.

I'm just going to read a couple of things to you. You ready? "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, etc. To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called saints." Let's try another one. "Paul, called to be an apostle, etc, to the Church of God, which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ, Jesus called to be, guess what? You can say it out loud, "saints." Good, thank you. Let's try another one. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus." I'm just saying. Y'all are getting it. It's okay. "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus here in Philippi." Notice that He didn't say to all you worthless wretches in Philippi. He didn't say that. The only ones who got kind of a stern greeting like that were the Galatians. Paul was like, "I cannot believe what I just heard about you guys." He got straight to the point, but he didn't stop calling them saints. The point was, "knock it off." Most of the letters are written to the "saints." The people who are sanctified, set apart, called, saved, delivered and healed in Jesus Christ. Say, "That's me."

Now, that doesn't mean you're going to be perfect. What it means is you've been changed. You are being changed. What He started in you, He's going to finish it. He's going to come back and get you, or you're going to go on being more like Him until He comes. That's your two options here, in Christ. Let that encourage you, "I'm not a sinner anymore." Doesn't mean I'm perfect. I can tell you a guy who sinned fairly recently, if you want to know. But, I'm not a sinner anymore. I'm characterized by His grace, by His fruits, and by His presence in my life. When I sin, it hurts me. I don't want that. That's how we know we belong to Him. When I remember who I was, it helps me understand how loved I am, and it keeps me humble in His presence.

I want to read three parables, and I want to talk about the danger of number one, of not receiving that in the first place. The danger that you're in if you think, "I'm good." I go to church on Sunday mornings, I'm good. My mom was a praying lady. I'm okay." But, not if you don't have your own relationship with Jesus Christ. Even for those of us who do, the fact

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that He tells us to “check yourself before you wreck yourself.” No, that's not what He said. He put it in different terms, “consider yourself.” That's what He said to us. He encouraged us constantly to “test ourselves, to keep ourselves humble.” That's what I want to get into for just a minute. What happens when either I deny or I forget that “I used to be a wretch, but now, I'm saved by grace?”

Matthew 7:21-23

I get really rattled when I read that, because you look at these people and look at what they're saying to Jesus. “We prophesy, we cast out demons, we did wonders in your name, and you're saying to me, “depart?” But, there are some keys here that you want to pay attention to. Not those who “say,” but those who “do.” Not those who “say” to me, “Lord, Lord will enter in.” Those who “do” the will of My Father in heaven.” Do you know what Lord means? Lord means master. Lord is like you own me and everything that has to do with me. There are a lot of people out there who know that Jesus is Lord, but they haven't come under that lordship yet. Here's a scary thing. If He's not Lord, He's not Savior either. If He is not the Master of your life, He's not saved you. That's what He's telling these people. They said, “Lord.” How do I know that they weren't saved? Look at the last part. “I never knew you.” That's important. “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” Well, these people are trying to defend themselves. “Lord, we cast out demons. Isn't that enough? Lord, we prophesied in your name. Isn't that enough? Lord, we did signs and wonders.” What they demonstrated was that the name of Jesus is powerful.

The name of Jesus has inherent power. That means it's in it. “We did the stuff, Lord. We did the cool things in your name.” What He saw was their heart. They did the things while practicing a lifestyle of sin. We used the power of your name to do what you said. He says, “I didn't know you.” What does He want? He wants us to do the things. Don't misunderstand me. He gave us the Holy Spirit. He gave us spiritual gifts so that we would do amazing things. But, what He wants first and foremost, is to know you and to be known by you. This is eternal life. That's what He prayed, “That they may know you, Father, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. That's eternal life. Not that I prophesied. Prophecy is excellent. It's a good gift. We're told to desire it. Do I want to heal the sick? Absolutely, and I want to cast out demons every day. But He said, “I never knew you.” Because you practice lawlessness.

1 John 3:4-5

Just so we understand what these people actually did. When He says to them, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” He's saying you have gone on sinning. You have gone on refusing to allow me to deliver your life from that. Therefore, you cannot say that I am your Lord. If I am not your Lord, I'm not your Savior. This is something that we want to always pay attention to. Is Jesus actually my Lord? Now, so we're clear, if I sin, will He forgive me? Absolutely.

1 John 1:9

How much of it is all? It's all of it? We like to say that here. Don't confuse what I'm saying. But, somebody who lives a lifestyle of sin and does the signs and wonders, will bring more shame upon the name of God. Because others say, “Hey, I saw you prophesy over here. But, aren't you the one that I saw cussing out the old lady the other day?” We are living in a time where we're watching great men and women of God fall publicly, because of sin that was kept hidden. Now, does that mean that they won't go to heaven? I don't think that's what that means. It's not my decision anyway. It's between them and God. But, what we have to be aware of is my lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus will make me more like Him. Then the more I'm like Him, the mighty works will follow. That's the right order, versus, let me try to use the power of His name, but not know and surrender to Him. Still a wretch but, practicing the power of the name of Jesus. That's not going to get me in. That's the first one.

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Let's go to another one. I promise this will become more encouraging in a moment. Bear with me. I can feel it like, whoo, yes, it's serious. Of course it's serious. This is talking about eternity. Yours or the people that you know. I want you to go out armed to the teeth, to be able to get to their heart. Saying, "Where are you and do you know Him?" That's the point. "Let me tell you my story." That's where we're going to land. "Let me tell you my story. I was blind now I see. I was a wretch. I'm saved now." That simple testimony. I'm stealing my own thunder. But, that simple testimony. There are a lot of people out there that need that. That's where we're going.

Matthew 22:1-14

So, in this one, I stopped here on purpose, because who was it that issued the call in the first place? It was a king. Now, you don't say no to a king, just saying. That King is the Lord. That King is the Master. What He says, goes. He could kill you just for saying no the first time. Understand that the fact the King sent messengers again and then again, were His attempts to be merciful to those He invited. It was within His rights to send the army out the minute they said no. You don't say no to a king. Our culture is different from that. In America, we don't like kings. We came about by rebelling against one. But, we have a King. His name is Jesus. We're learning in America, in this day and hour, to submit ourselves to the will of King Jesus. Regardless of who is in power and who is not in power, or who's popular and who's not popular, that's what the church in America is in the process of relearning this. Our King is king, no matter who is senator, congressman, governor, president, or whoever. Jesus is King. That's established.

So, what happened? He invited people, and they said no, and then they killed His servants. Well, we understand who He's talking about. That was the prophets. That was the evangelists. Those are the ones that were sent and they were killed. So, those that said no, they got their wish and they don't get to come in. Let's not be in that group. What about the others? He sent people out to the highways and the byways. In other words, go find those undesirable, lost people that are wandering around out there. Bring them into My home and they'll sit down at the wedding feast. Go get those who will listen. Go get the unclean. Go, get the forgotten and bring them to My table.

Now I read a commentary on this by Matthew Henry, and I want to share a little bit of what I learned from that commentary. This is a wedding feast, that represents the fullness of what God is offering. What is on the table at God's wedding feast? Salvation, deliverance, healing, shalom, peace, everything in its place, with nothing missing, nothing broken. Friendship and love with people who are like minded like you. You can't even imagine people that are closer to you than your own relatives and would lay down their lives for you. A destiny and a call, that's what's on the table. Every person wants to feel that their life means something. On this table that you've been invited to is the reality that your life matters, that you're here for a reason, that you're valuable, and that somebody out there needs what you have. That's what's on the table. Now, were any of the people that were called worthy of that? No, they weren't, but they were invited, they were called, they came, they sat down and they ate at the King's table. All that was required of them was they said, "yes."

One other thing, they had to put on a wedding garment. Because, after all that, you have all these people in the banqueting hall. It's full, and that's what God wants. God wants a full house. He wants everybody at the table. Those who say no, they get what they asked for, sadly enough. But, this one guy came in, and when the King came, He looked at him and said, "This fellow does not have on a wedding garment." He said to him, "Friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?" That's the one that was bound and removed. To the Western mind, that looks pretty harsh. But, let me tell you what this guy did. He refused to take off the old man and put on Christ. Why did this guy get kicked out? I thought the King wanted everybody there.

Ephesians 4:20-24

This man wanted to eat the feast. Who could blame him? He heard the invitation and he came. But, what he did was he tried to sit at the King's table on his own terms. How do I know that? In Jewish wedding customs, especially among the wealthy or kings, you didn't have to even bring your own wedding garment. They had a whole rack. When you got there, all you had to do was take off what you came in and put on what He gave you. I think you see now. "Take off the old man and put on what I am freely giving you. You don't have to go home. Come, if you don't have a wedding garment, I've got one for you. The blood of My son will cover you. The blood of My Son makes your clothes that were filthy rags as white as snow. All you have to do is take off your old man, leave it at the door, and come in wearing the garment that I'm freely giving you." What did this guy do? He said, No, I want to eat the feast, but I think that what I have is good enough. I don't know. Is that what he thought? Maybe, "I don't believe that I am unrighteous. I'm coming in under my own terms." Can't do it.

If you want to come, step one, is you believe that He is God. Step two is, if He is God, you take His evaluation, not your own thoughts. If you're not willing to put down what you think, that's why. "How did you come in here without a wedding garment?" The guy in that moment realizes, "I messed up. I don't even have an argument for defense." That's the representation of the judgment seat. The feast is prepared. The people are enjoying it, but this one has no answer. "Bind him. Take him out. Weeping and gnashing of teeth are out there." You want to know why you cry? Part of it is because you realize what you missed out on. You saw it, you tasted it, you were there, and all you had to do was to take off the old man and put on Christ, and you said no. Gnashing of teeth is a painful, emotional thing. Can you imagine what that would feel like to have seen the feast of God and to be kicked out? So let us consider, when you sit at the King's table, you do so on His terms.

His terms are not burdensome. You take off the old man. Guess what? My old man stinks anyway. People think I'm joking when I tell them I'm not very good at running my life, and that's just the truth. I wouldn't have picked for me as many blessings as I get to live in at this exact moment. I wouldn't have picked it. I would not have said that I'm worthy of it. My wife, my daughter, and getting to go play those drums on Sundays. I'm not even joking when I say this. "I'm living the dream. I'm living the dreams that I've had since I was a young man, and I wouldn't have thought I was good enough." Jesus said this, "Take My yoke upon you, because My burden is easy and My yoke is light. I'm lowly, I'm gentle. Be taught by Me. I don't want to weigh you down. I want to lift you up." We have to understand that's the King, not the king. That's like "You didn't do things My way, and you have to leave." line. That wasn't the point. The point was, "If you're not going to take off what you brought and you're not going to put on what I gave you, then you chose not to be here. It's not burdensome." Let's not be those who say "Lord," but don't make Him Lord. Let's not be those who don't take off the old garment. Let's be those who come and sit at the feast. Let's do one more. I'm almost done with this part. Y'all stay with me.

Matthew 25:1-13

This is another one that rattles me, because one of the things that I've noticed is that all ten of them were virgins. All ten of them had kept themselves unstained. They were pure. You might say they didn't break the rules. They did what they were supposed to do, but the parable starts off calling them foolish virgins. Why? Well, I'll tell you why. Here's a parallel example. I like to go fishing at night. I have to have a flashlight or I can't see. If I told you I'm taking a flashlight with no batteries. What would you think about my intelligence? I have a flashlight. I know that it needs batteries. I'm not taking any batteries. You're like, good luck. Not all the lights are on. Not all the tools in the shed are sharp. Pick your analogy there. But you immediately come to the conclusion, I am not the smartest cookie, right?

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You know you need batteries to make the flashlight come on. If you know that and you don't take batteries, that's on you. That's what a lamp is. A lamp is a light. In order for a lamp to give light, it needs oil. This is common knowledge. If you take a lamp and no oil, what do you expect to happen? That's why they were called foolish virgins.

Now I do want to bring this up. Also, none of the virgins were perfect. They all fell asleep. That wasn't part of the plan. You weren't supposed to be asleep. They all fell asleep. So none of them were perfect, but some of them had oil. What is oil? Oil is the Holy Spirit. When does the Holy Spirit come in? When you make Jesus Lord and Savior, you receive the Holy Spirit, and then you can still be baptized, immersed in the Holy Spirit. But, you have Holy Spirit the minute you said yes to Jesus. What does that tell you? Some wise virgins had something full of oil that could give off light. Well, that sounds familiar. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven." They knew what the vessel was for. The vessel is to be full, to give off light. The foolish ones had a form, but no power. I followed the rules. I have the thing.

Can I make it real for you? "My mom and my grandma were praying, ladies, I go to church every Sunday. I give money whenever people need it. I gave money to the to the San Angelo Strong thing. I'm good." Do you have the Holy Spirit or not? Do you belong to Jesus or not? Look at what He says. They showed up later, and He says, "I don't know you. I've already started my wedding feast. I've already shut the door. The time that you had to give yourself to me to get the oil, it's over." That's the part that you think, "Wow, He's not being mean, they had a chance. They knew what it was for. They had all day to get the oil." Suddenly, "Oh, Jesus, is here. I need oil." No, that's not the time. The time is now. We want to stay humble. We're not like those who say to Him, "Lord, Lord." But, my life says something different. We want to stay humble so we recognize the only way I eat at His table is if I put on His garment. That's humility. "I'll receive everything that you have for me. I'm going to enjoy every bit of it, and I'm going to do it on your terms. I don't want to be foolish to think I have a form, I have a thing, but I don't have oil."

Can I tell you that in each one of those there's an opposite of that? It far overshadows. It's easy to focus on, "Wow, bad things happen to those people." Yeah, they did. But, think about the people that did cast out demons, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and also had a living relationship with Jesus. They will live their entire lives knowing Him. Then when their body dies, it just goes straight into the next thing that's way better. Those don't get told, "Depart from me. I never knew you." They get told, "Enter into the joy of your Master, of your actual Lord." The people were at the banquet, and how many of them feasted upon all of those things? Yes, I'll have healing for my body. Yes, I'll have emotional healing. Yes, I'll have Holy Spirit baptism. Yes, I'll work in miracles. Yes, I'll pray for the sick and they'll get better. Yes, I'll have purpose and destiny and a new identity.

But, that's what I'm saying. The one guy gets kicked out, and we're all like, "Oh, that's terrible." But, look at the full banquet hall of people receiving everything the King had for them. That's where our eyes should be if we're in Jesus. "The foolish virgins, poor girls, poor poor girls," but man, "Five of them had oil in the lamp. where are they?" They're in with the Lord forever. "Enter into the joy of your Master."

We want to know Him. We want to stay humble before Him. We want to let Him love us. I want to remember what I was. "I was a wretch, but God loved me anyway."

Romans 5:6-11

I was His enemy, and He died for me anyway, to give me life and hope and salvation and joy. You need joy right now. I need joy right now. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." How can you be joyful San Angelo, look what happened? Bless the family of that one person. We lost one,

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only one in a city of 100,000. We're joyful because the Lord protected so many lives. We have brave people out there on the streets risking their lives. Bless the Lord for that. Our president came and declared it a disaster area. Our leaders are working on our behalf. That's the Lord's favor. How can you be joyful, San Angelo? Because the Lord has protected and saved so many of us. The Lord is going to restore what the enemy took. We needed that water anyway. What the enemy intended for bad, the Lord will turn it for His good. That's how we can be joyful, because of the life of His son. Regardless, my life is going on. If this body dies, I'm going on. That's how I can be joyful. We were still enemies, and He loved us that much. How much more now that we're His children? How much more now that we're family?

Hebrews 12:1-3

Hostility from sinners against Himself. The very people that He was here to save were the same ones spitting on Him, beating Him, calling Him names and mocking Him. You know, at any moment, He could have just said, "All right, Father, I've had enough. Wipe them out." He could have, but He didn't. He went through it. Why? Because He loves us. I want you to consider this for a second. While Jesus was enduring all of that. Why did He do what He did? It says, "For the joy that was set before Him." Do you want to know what that joy is? "It's you with Him forever. You're worth it." That's the price He paid. While I was still His enemy, He looked at me and said, "I love you enough that I will do this for you, and all I want is for you to accept My invitation and let me have your life. I'll take what it is and I'll make it what it can be." He took the sin, the disease, and the emotional turmoil. He took the wrath that we had rightfully earned. In place of that, He gave us His sonship. He gave us His righteousness. That's how we know we're loved. He has nothing to gain from saving me, except me. He said, "I'll take the deal. If those are the terms, if it's going to cost me everything, and all I get is you, I say, "Yes," to that.

That's the heart of the God that we're here worshiping today. That's who it is that we came to celebrate. That's who it is that loves us. I was a wretch. I was blind to that love, but now I see. I'm reminding you of this today, if you know Him. Because, I want you to go and tell that story to the people in your life. "I was a wretch. I was lost. Now I'm found, and now I see." Right now in San Angelo, America, there are people who are hurting and desperate. I'm not only talking about those who lost houses to the flood or relative to the flood. I'm talking about some people in all the various parts of this town who are still lost and have no idea that they're loved. They have no idea that God actually sees them and cares about them.

One of the biggest things that will stop you is thinking, "Well, some people have some pretty clever arguments. Boy, they know some things." That's true. There are some clever arguments out there, but you have a testimony. You don't have to argue. You want to know why, because you know whom you have believed. You don't need an argument. You don't have to know all the history and all the Greek and all the Hebrew. That's helpful. I'm thankful for the people who do know that. I love apologetics. It's really fun, but at the end of the day, I don't believe because somebody has a clever argument. I believe, because I know Him. You might as well try to convince me that Kimmi isn't real. I know her. I can tell you what she eats. I can tell you what she likes. I can tell you some of the things that really irritate her, because I know her.

I'm going to read you one last verse here today, as you consider your testimony. What God has done in your life really matters, and how just sharing that with people is truly powerful. That man named John Newton shared His testimony in a song called Amazing Grace. To this day, when people hear that song, they're cut to the heart, because a wretch like that just told his story, and worshiped God with His heart. Why not you? Why not me? I want to read this, and then we'll play a song. We'll worship together for just a minute, and we'll wrap up.

Titus 3:3-8 NLT

“Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy and we hated each other. But when God, our Savior, revealed His kindness and love, He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Because of His grace, He declared us righteous and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying, and I want you to insist on these teachings so that all who trust in God will devote themselves to doing good. These teachings are good and beneficial for everyone.”

That's our story. That's who we were, and who we are now. We belong to Him. In just a moment after I pray, there's going to be a song playing, and if you need to go, you are welcome to do so. Be blessed and the Lord keep you. If you feel that there is business for you today. Then there's two things that I would like to invite you to consider doing. One of them is, if you feel that there's any part of you, that any of those parables spoke to like, “Oh, I've used the name of the Lord, but I haven't pursued His intimacy. I'm trying to know Him on my own terms.” If there's any part of those things, “I've got a form, but no power.” I'm going to invite you to come to the sides and let it be just you and Him. Let Him minister to you. Let Him do whatever He needs to do.

Then if there's anybody in this room who doesn't know that Jesus is your Lord, don't leave. Don't leave with that still the case. I'm going to be here, and there will be some people with me. Come and talk to any one of us. If you don't want to come up here, find one of us. Hey, Garden family members, raise your hand. Find one of these people with their hand up. They'll talk to you right where they're at, Okay? Anybody that had their hand up is more than able to lead you to Jesus.

Let's pray, and then the song will play. If you need prayer or ministry, we're here.

“Lord God, thank you for the power of the testimony that you have given us. Thank you for people who will share what you've done in such powerful and beautiful ways. We remember where we came from. We thank you for where we are. We're so looking forward to what you have for us in the future. God, you are past, present and future. The God who is, who was and who is to come. I pray, Lord, for your conviction to come upon each one of us. Let there be no part of us that's not surrendered to Your Lordship. We thank you, God, that each and every one of us has a story to tell about you, your power, your goodness and your grace. I ask for your peace and your comfort, to come. Along with conviction, to know that we belong to you, and to know that we're yours forever. This is eternal life, to know you, Father, and Jesus Christ, whom you've sent. Reveal yourself to us God in ways that we can understand. What you give us is ours forever, and we receive it. Continue to bless our city and heal our city. Cause your name to be lifted up here as we love each other just the way we would love ourselves. We do love you Lord. We choose today to remind ourselves, and to receive your love. In the name of Jesus, amen.”