

The Bottom Line

Matthew 21

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Please close your eyes. If you are a parent, I want you to picture your first child. If you are not a parent, I want you to picture the child of your dreams, the child that would carry your life into the future.

Picture that child, your child, the gift of God, and now imagine that in prayer and thanksgiving, God the Father speaks to you. He calls you by name and then says, "Take your child, the one you love, and cut his or her throat. Burn His body on an altar of wood as a burnt offering to me."

Would you do it?

Demons would love to have us kill our children, but suppose you plead the blood, and you were sure this was no demon. This was God.

Would you do it?

You may say, "That's entirely unethical, irresponsible, and completely stupid. It's insane.

So would you do it?

You may say, "God would never ask such a thing."

Genesis 22:

After these things ¹God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose

early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. [Imagine Isaac carrying that wood on his back up that mountain.] And he [Abraham] took in his hand the fire and the knife.

Now remember who Isaac is... He is Abraham's laughter. He is everything, everything, everything that old Abraham has worked for. He is the promised land, Israel. He is the city, Jerusalem. He is the temple of the living God. He is the promised blessing.

So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, [†] "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

Well, Abraham knew that God had provided Isaac. The author of Hebrews wrote that, "Abraham believed God

could raise Isaac from the dead.” Whatever the case, Abraham had come to believe that God was good. So he trusted *the* Good more than his *knowledge* of the Good.

Abraham raised his knife to slay Isaac. At the last second, the angel of the Lord stopped Abraham’s hand. Abraham looked and God had provided a lamb which Abraham sacrificed in Isaac’s place. Can you imagine how Abraham looked at that lamb?

Yet, if you’re like me, you wonder, “Why would God do that? What’s the point? What’s the purpose of all that chaos, futility, and pain? What is God growing in a place like that?”

Well, Genesis records that Abraham named that place, “The Lord will provide” (Genesis 22:14). You know, Jerusalem, the city of Peace, was built in that place. It was built with human hands, yet “The Lord will provide.”

Another Jerusalem is also built in that place, but not with human hands. Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham “looked forward to the city. . . whose builder and maker is God.”

So what is God building in that place of chaos, futility, and pain?

Well, about 2,000 years later, the seed of Abraham arrived at that place. Matthew 21, Jesus obtained two donkeys.

- ~ He was taking a journey with His Father up Mount Moriah.
- ~ He was entering old Jerusalem, made with human hands.

As Jesus entered, the crowds came to Him and hailed Him as king. Yet Jesus was weeping and prophesying the city’s destruction.

It's clear, He could've mobilized the crowd, captured the temple and the city, driven out the Romans, establishing the geo-political nation state of Israel and saved His people from what He would call in Matthew 24:21, "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no and never will be."

Within a generation, 70 A.D., Titus laid siege to Jerusalem. The suffering in the city, as recorded by historians like Josephus, was utterly catastrophic.

Well, it certainly appears that Jesus could have prevented it. The suffering in this world is utterly catastrophic, and it certainly appears that God could prevent it.

Well, the Father and the Son didn't and don't.

Instead of seizing power, by the end of the week the Seed of Abraham, the lamb of God is walking up the mountain with cursed wood strapped to His back. No angel stops the hand of the executioners. The lamb is slain. Jesus is crucified. The Seed is buried in the ground.

Has it ever occurred to you how entirely irresponsible, imprudent, and non-pragmatic Jesus must have seemed to His disciples?

He was sacrificing a 2,000 year old building program, the entire budget, and all the religious works of His people.

Why? What's the point? What's the purpose of all that chaos, futility, and pain? What is God growing in a place like that? What's so valuable it merits tribulation and such that the world has never seen?

Matthew 21, Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the temple, then in verse 18:

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.

Last week, we preached on that fig tree. It reminded us of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," and seemed to be a picture of old Israel, old Jerusalem, the old temple, and the old covenant. I think the tree is a picture of living by the law in the power of the flesh. It's a picture of human religion.

When Abraham sacrificed Isaac, he must've cursed that fig tree. The Law hadn't yet been given at Sinai, yet it was written on His heart. Sacrificing his son would go against every ethical system imaginable, but more than that, it would seem entirely unreasonable and profoundly irresponsible.

It must've taken incredible faith.

You know, pretty much all religion,
at least human religion, is a way to *not* have faith.

Most religion is

systems and principles,
steps for you to take and
things for you to do,
laws for you to obey,
so *you* can save *you*,
so you don't have to trust a savior.

Liberals

love to turn Jesus into an ethical principle we apply.

Conservatives

love to turn Jesus into moral virtues we legislate.

Pentecostals

love to turn Jesus into a formula for tricks we turn.

Evangelicals

love to take the Word of God and make Him a cookbook we use.

Ethics, morals, formulas, and cookbooks...

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Abraham must've cursed 'em all or
he'd never gotten up that mountain.

Eve turned to that cursed tree from lack of faith.
We turn to that tree so we won't need faith.

John Cavanaugh is a brilliant ethicist, that is one who studies the knowledge of good and evil. Once he traveled to Calcutta and petitioned Mother Theresa saying, "Pray that I have clarity."

She answered, "No, I will not do that."

When he asked why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of."

Cavanaugh commented that he thought she always had the clarity that he longed for.

Mother Theresa laughed and said, "I have never had clarity. What I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."

That's called faith.

Abraham had very little clarity but a lot of trust. And Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and then, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

That’s like *no* clarity and *all* trust.
It’s faith.

When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

Faith...

maybe that’s the fruit Jesus wants.
maybe that’s the fruit that can’t grow on the tree of Law, even though we expect it will.

We confuse faith with virtue.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote, “The opposite of sin is faith. And this is one of the most decisive definitions of Christianity that the opposite of sin is faith and never virtue.”

Faith is the fruit you are to grow,
yet can’t grow by merely trying.

That’s frustrating!

“... for whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive ... *if* you have faith.”

Some people think that faith means like concentration, so you can just work it up and grow it by just trying... so scatterbrains, ADD types, and children never get in (even though we must become like children to enter?). Concentrate hard enough, and never doubt, and you can cast Mount Zion into the sea.

Well, just three chapters ago, Jesus said if you have faith like a mustard seed you can move a mountain, the Mount of Transfiguration.

Maybe it's not the amount of faith, as much as the kind of faith. Mustard seeds are alive, even though they look dead. You bury them in the dirt, and they grow. Maybe faith is something living that God has to plant in you and make grow.

And maybe Mt. Zion is more than just a rock, and the sea is more than just water.

You know, Mt. Zion moves in Matthew 27:51, as Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, cries out from the cursed tree and surrenders all things to God... the mountain moves. But more than that, the curtain in the temple rips from top to bottom. Something gets out and goes to the sea. God to the nations. Life to the chaos, like the tree of life is uprooted and planted in the sea (Luke 17:6).

“Whatever you ask in prayer you will receive if you have faith.” Some people think that means concentrating really hard, like faith in your faith, like a work you can do.

So concentrate hard enough and you'll get whatever you want, which means you'd, like, create your own reality, existing entirely in a self-centered reality of your own construction which sounds to me like insanity and hell, and maybe in the end, it is.

C.S. Lewis suggested that the final judgment is God saying, "As you wish."

Well, some people say faith isn't faith in faith, faith is trusting God's word, His expressed will. So praying in faith is asking according to God's will.

You'll remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Take this cup from me, nevertheless not as I will but as You will." We can be thankful Jesus prayed in faith, according to God's will.

Hebrews 12:22 says that I have come to Mt. Zion. "You have come to Mt. Zion and the city of the living God." Now, I've never been to the Middle East, yet here on the other side of the sea, I've come to Zion. That means Zion came to me because Jesus prayed for me.

Well, praying in faith must be at least praying in God's will. 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." So let's pray it...

Lord, in Jesus' name, we ask that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance. We pray for Osama Bin Laden sitting in his cave. We pray for Saddam Hussein in his jail cell. We pray for Hugh Hefner locked in his mansion of lust, that the Holy Mountain would go to them. You would reveal yourself to them, that You would save them, so that they would fall at Your feet and honor You as the one true Lord. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Does it bother you to pray that prayer? Not because God might not answer it, but because he might. If it bothers you because you don't understand how God *could* answer

it, that's fine. Faith is trusting God more than your own understanding.

But if it bothers you that too many might receive mercy, maybe you don't have faith in mercy, and so maybe you didn't pray in faith. So maybe you'll get your wish and those people won't be there. Maybe they won't exist in your afterlife. Maybe no one that bothers or offends you will be there, just you alone in a universe without mercy... As you wish.

Well, I pray that's not what you wish.

"Whatever you ask in prayer, you'll receive if you have faith." "Whatever..." so faith must be like the bottom line.

Faith is the bottom line because once you have it, you can get whatever you want. Faith is the bottom line, and that's frustrating because we think the bottom line is stuff like money in the bank, investment portfolios, real estate in your possession, businesses, programs, human resources, nations, cities, stone temples. You know, things you can touch and feel or at least comprehend, control, and manipulate, like formulas, systems, and laws.

But faith... faith is so hard to handle. You know, we can give an admin report or an annual review, plot money in the bank, graph the number of bottoms in seats at service, even chart conversion rates on mission trips or sermon tape sales and pretend that that's the bottom line—measurable results.

But faith is not a measurable result. How can we plot that? How can we judge that? People often say, "Lord, Lord..." and don't even know Him. How can we judge? So how can we judge our neighbor, ourselves, our progress? How can we compete with Southern Gables, West Bowles, and Rockland? And how can you feel proud? How can you

feel successful if faith (faith in something you can't control) is the bottom line?

"Faith, hope, and love abide," remain, wrote Paul, like imperishable seed. Yet this entire tangible world will be dissolved by fire. What we thought was solid is like an illusion, and what we thought was like an illusion is eternally solid (even physicists are telling us that).

It's like all things are just a prop for building your faith—all creation, just a womb to give birth to faith, all things are sacrifice for the sake of faith in you. For once you have faith, God says, "Well, of course, you may receive all things. No problemo!" Faith is the bottom line.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither

will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

When you have faith in someone, you grant them authority. Jesus isn't going to argue with them for their faith, as if His authority is derived from any source other than God. You either recognize God or you don't, for what derivative authority could validate God? Your knowledge of good and evil?

So you can't arrive at faith by argument alone. Faith is your underlying assumption about every argument. Faith is the reality you choose, or more accurately, the reality that chooses you and chooses in you... like free will in you.

Well, Jesus points out, this same authority (God) was at work in John, indeed in all the prophets. Jesus is all over the Old Testament. Yet these leaders refuse to have faith because they want to maintain control. Faith is surrender, but their bottom line is control. They have no fruit, but at least they're in control of the vineyard.

Do you remember the vineyard? Jesus just told a story about it in the last chapter.

The vineyard produces grapes.

The grapes are crushed in a wine press.

They bleed, and the blood is wine.

The fruit of the vineyard is mercy, *khesed*, steadfast love.

Twice quoting Hosea, Jesus has said, “I desire mercy [*khesed* in Hebrew].”

Well, in Jesus' story, the early workers hate the mercy of the land owner.

That is, they hate the produce of the vineyard.

They have no faith in mercy.

Now Jesus says,

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind [repented] and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.”

So your faith results in action.

If you have faith in the law, you will be legalistic.
If you have faith in mercy, you’ll be merciful and fulfill the law.

The first son says, “I won’t obey.” Yet, he works the vineyard which produces mercy. The second son says, “I will obey. I can obey.” From archaeological evidence, scholars have discovered that this son had bumper stickers and T-shirts. They all said, “Jesus is Lord.” He was constantly singing, “I have decided to follow Jesus.” He thought he worked the vineyard all day, but it turns out he never worked it at all because he didn’t know what it was producing. How could he work according to his Father’s will when he didn’t believe in his Father’s will, which was mercy?

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you ⁱⁿ the way of righteousness, and you

did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”

Tax collectors and prostitutes... what a cut. Tax collectors were traitors, and prostitutes were like... prostitutes. Tax collectors and prostitutes didn't build Israel, guard Jerusalem, and save the temple. Tax collectors and prostitutes didn't offer sacrifices and study the law.

Prostitutes did nothing except... wash Jesus' feet with tears, anoint Jesus with perfume for His burial, and then weep at the foot of His cross.

Tax collectors did nothing but cry, "I'm not worthy" in the temple and then write Gospels, like the Gospel of Matthew that we're reading now.

Tax collectors and prostitutes had faith in mercy. They received mercy like Abraham received that slaughtered lamb... They drank it like the very best wine. They drank mercy and bled mercy and mercy is khesed.

Khesed is steadfast love, covenant love, loving kindness.

Mercy is love, and

God is love, and

What is the Revelation of love? Jesus

What is the Word of love? Jesus

What is the nature of love? Jesus

Faith in Jesus is faith in the Revelation of God, Word of God, and nature of God.

Faith in Jesus is faith in mercy manifest.

Faith in Jesus is faith in the Way, the Truth, and the Life rather than faith in your own ability to find the way, discern the truth, and produce life.

Faith in Jesus is faith in the lamb that was slain, the lamb that the *Lord* provides.

Faith in Jesus is faith in the seed of Abraham.

Faith in Jesus is Jesus in you,
taking root like a mustard seed in fertile soil,
like a life implanted in a womb.

Faith in Jesus is faith in mercy. Faith in Jesus is love.
“He who loves is born of God and knows God”
“God is love.”

That’s the bottom line.
Faith is the bottom line in you.

Normally, we don’t even see it. If we do, we turn away because of where it grows. We think the bottom line is what we can control—our systems, our sermons, our buildings, our programs, our businesses, our churches, our missions, the stone temples we build, the cities we occupy, the nations we found, the laws we serve.

Galatians 5:6, “The only thing that counts is faith working through love.”

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong

or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, ^{so} as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ^{If} I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, ^{but} have not love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

That's horrifying and liberating.

Horrifying because I could gain the whole world and forfeit my soul. Liberating because nothing of this world defines me, and at any moment, I can thoroughly succeed.

I mean at any moment, even the worst moment (actually, especially the worst moment because that's where the fruit grows) at any moment, through Christ, I can offer God the fruit He most desires... faith in His mercy, His love. That's liberating.

Many of you knew my father. March 8th is the one year anniversary of his death. Dad was a pastor for 50 years. I think this was his favorite church. He loved you so very much.

If you were to ask me, "Who was the most successful and fruitful pastor you've ever known, Peter?" Hands down, it would be my dad, and I've known lots of famous pastors. I worked at President Reagan's church. I served with pastors that were world famous speakers and authors, but hands down, without question, it would be my dad. And many of you would say, "Amen" to that.

What many of you don't know is that after years of working tirelessly in the church, he was basically fired from his last two churches: first, for not growing the church

fast enough (there were a lot of other, more honest reasons, but that's what they said); second, for not being a dynamic enough preacher (and that wasn't Dad's thing, so I don't blame them). Dad spent the last several years of his life selling real estate in order to make ends meet.

When I start worrying about the budget, and the building and the programs, attendance, and who I offended in the sermon, I remember I'm called to be fruitful. And so

I'm aiming for Dad.

I'm aiming for Abraham.

I'm aiming for Jesus.

You know, Jesus died an absolute failure by worldly standards.

Abraham appeared insane and never saw the promised city with earthly eyes.

And by worldly standards, Dad wasn't much of a success.

Yet Andrew Trawick is preaching around the world because of Dad. Tom Larson is providing healing water to the 3rd world, he says because of Dad. Many of you are better fathers and mothers and love Jesus more because of Dad. If you're blessed at all by LMCC, it's because of Dad, or I should say because of what was in Dad because none of that stuff is the bottom line.

Dad had the bottom line.

Faith in mercy, so he bled mercy.

He had faith in Jesus.

So, hands down, the most fruitful man I ever knew was Dad. People ask why I went into the ministry. It's weird. I wanted to be a scientist because they dealt with what's "real," what you can see, taste, touch, and feel. It

hadn't occurred to me yet that the one seeing, tasting, touching, and feeling might be more "real" than what is seen, tested, touched, and felt. While I was studying Geology at C.U., I saw something more real...

I saw my dad sacrifice his city, his plans, his dreams (twice). I saw him fail but totally succeed. I watched him surrender the church he loved but still have faith in God's mercy.

He had faith in Jesus
even when Jesus didn't work for him.

He had faith in Jesus
even when it meant losing his city.

He had faith in Jesus
even when Jesus hung naked, beaten, and dead on the wood.

He had faith in Jesus
or Jesus *was* the faith in him,
the bottom line in him.

Whatever the case, it was more real than the rocks I was studying. It was a stone more solid than all the rest. So as Dad worked to build God a city, God built His city in Dad and with Dad... like a living stone.

Well, the chief priests and elders built their own city and their own temple of dead stone right on Mount Moriah, and they wouldn't surrender it to anyone.

"Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a

fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and¹ went into another country.

This is straight out of Isaiah 5. It is a history of Israel and a parable of all humanity.

When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and¹ stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Most commentators think that's hyperbole, "They will respect my son." I think it's prophecy, "One day, they will respect my son. Every knee will bow."

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and¹ let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

*“ ‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?*

*Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will
be taken away from you and given to a
people producing its fruits. And the one who
falls on this stone will be broken to pieces;
and when it falls on anyone, it will crush
him.” ¶ When the chief priests and the
Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived
that he was speaking about them. And
although they were seeking to arrest him,
they feared the crowds, because they held
him to be a prophet.*

So we’re back to where we started five weeks ago,
the destruction of Jerusalem. Remember I said this is about
far more than a country in the Middle East or a physical
city in Palestine or a temple made of stone.

This is about your heart.

God doesn’t want a temple made of stone,
He wants your heart.

God doesn’t want a walled city,
He wants a surrendered bride.

He wants a holy nation, a church, that will receive His
Word, like seed in her womb, bearing the fruit of
faith in His mercy.

And now, where does that fruit grow? Where is that faith in mercy found? Mount Moriah, where we surrender our plans, our efforts, our works.

Where we fail, and He succeeds.
Where we fail and receive His mercy.
Where we come to the end of ourselves, and so see the Lamb that is slain that God provides.

This whole world is now Moriah for that mountain has been cast to the sea.

So what's God growing in all this chaos, futility, and pain? What is worth all this chaos, futility, and pain? What is He growing?

Jesus in you.
Body broken, blood shed.
Bread and wine.
Faith in His mercy.

Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

This is a picture of Mt. Moriah in 30 A.D. on a Friday. [Footage from The Passion of the Christ is shown—The earthquake. Calvary shakes. The temple shakes.]

This is a picture of the first fruits of the great harvest of the Earth. [Footage from The Passion of the Christ is shown—Jesus, being taken down from the cross.]

This is a picture of Mother Church, the church in this world. [Footage from The Passion of the Christ is shown—Mother Mary at the foot of the cross, holding the broken body of Jesus in her arms. His spilt blood stains her lips and cheeks.]

And this is a picture of the slaughtered Lamb who at this moment is standing on a throne in authority over all that is. [Footage from The Passion of the Christ is shown—The camera pans to a full picture of Jesus in Mary's arms.]

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9,
 What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
 nor the heart of man conceived,
 what God has prepared for those who love Him”

I used to quote that and say, “imagine beaches, banquets, and streets of gold.” Then I’d say, “It’s better than anything your heart can conceive.” But actually, Paul says our hearts can conceive and have conceived it. That’s his point that I always missed. What the world can’t conceive, we have. God has revealed it to us.

It’s Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
 The heart of God for you.

Do you want Him or
 do you despise Him?

He’s the bottom line.

And on the night He was betrayed, He took bread, and He broke it saying, “This is my body given to you. Do this in remembrance of me. Take and eat.”

And in the same manner, after supper He took the cup, and He said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in

my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins, the fruit of the vine. Do this in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you, in my Father's kingdom."

And so, we invite you to come forward, in faith. You only need just a mustard seed of faith. We invite you to come forward, if you want Him, and receive the Bottom Line, by grace through faith in His mercy. Amen.

[The worship band finishes with "Better than Life"]

So, do you believe that [His loving kindness is better than life]? Kind of... a little bit, maybe about like about the size of a mustard seed. But if you believed that and never doubted, why, you'd be without sin. You wouldn't worry. You wouldn't be afraid. You'd lay your life down like that [Peter snaps his fingers]. You'd look exactly like Jesus. But you do believe it... Believe it a little and it will grow.

You know, loving kindness is better than life. Loving kindness is the way the King James translates the Hebrew word, *khesed*, which gets translated as the Greek equivalent of mercy in the Septuagint. They're all the same word that Jesus said He is looking for. And God is showing you, "My loving kindness is better than life!"

That's why this life is fading away. It will all be devoured with fire. He's showing you. In fact, one day you'll arrive at that city, you'll see that city, you'll be able to see it with a new body and new eyes... beaches, glorious

beaches, and beautiful mountains, and streets paved with gold, and your wife in your favorite bikini holding a steak and a beer, and it will be like a discipline for you to notice those things because your eyes will be locked upon the One who sits on the throne. The Lamb standing as if He'd been slain—slain for the love of you.

His loving kindness is better than life... your old life, but it will be your new life.

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

¶So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. . . . So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Genesis 22:3-8, 22:14

But too often it has been overlooked that the opposite of sin is not virtue, not by any manner of means. This is in part a pagan view which is content with a merely human measure and properly does not know what sin is, that all sin is before God. No, the opposite of sin is faith, as

is affirmed in Romans 14:23, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” And for the whole of Christianity it is one of the most decisive definitions that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.

Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death

Now faith is just this paradox, that the single individual, though under the demands of the universal, is higher than the universal. If that is not faith, then Abraham is done for and faith has never existed in the world. . . . But faith is just this paradox, that the single individual, though bound by the universal, is higher than the universal. As a single individual, as the particular, he stands in an absolute relation to the Absolute. The ethical is thus suspended. Faith is this paradox.

Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. . . . In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

Matthew 21:1-2, 18-22

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

Matthew 17:19-20

Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

John 6:28-29

Now faith is the assurance [substance – KJV] of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. . . . And without faith it is impossible to please him.

Hebrews 11:1, 6a

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Matthew 21:23-27

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ” . . . Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the

Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew 3:1-2, 5-12

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Matthew 21:28-32

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy [khesed], and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 9:11-13

For I desire steadfast love [khesed] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. . . . Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love [khesed]; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

Hosea 6:6, 10:12

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy [khesed], and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Matthew 12:6

“Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the

season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

" 'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Matthew 21:33-46

The authorities predictably respond to this statement by trying once again to arrest Jesus. But fearing the multitudes—prudently apprehensive that a popular uproar might bring down the political house of cards that has been their life's work—they put off their plans till they can con the populace into being ground to a powder along with them. Mark and Luke add the detail here that "they perceived that he had told this parable against them."—a perception that any five year old could have come up with, but that still deserves a final word. For Jesus was against them. And he is against the world, too. He stands in judgment against everyone who will not accept his acceptance of the world by faith alone, but he brings down his gavel only on the folly that will not see that he judges nothing else—not goodness, not badness, not anything. And that is such a strange kind of againstness, such a blessed resistance of the world's insistence on judgment by works, that you'd think it would make us all laugh out loud. But the self-justifying

world (including an alarmingly large number of Christians who think that being well behaved is more important to God than just trusting his forgiveness) can see it—and him—only as a threat. As any preacher who seriously preaches the Gospel of grace can tell you, the troops are not amused by the prospect of absolutely free salvation. The first instinct of most Christians, after they have smiled indulgently at the preacher's charmingly easygoing concept of salvation, is to nail him to the wall for knocking the props out from under divine retribution for nasty deeds. They do not want grace, they want law.

Robert Farrar-Capan, Kingdom, Grace, Judgment

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Galatians 5:4-6

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