

The Subversive Gospel – Part 1

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MAIN VERSES

[Romans 10:9](#) • [Acts 17:7](#) • [Matthew 6:24](#) • [Luke 4:18](#) • [Acts 2:44-45](#) • [Philemon 1:16](#) • [Romans 6:22](#) • [1 Corinthians 15:52](#) • [Philippians 3:20-21](#) • [Galatians 2:20](#) • [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) • [1 Peter 4:10](#) • [Matthew 5:44](#) • [Romans 12:20](#) • [Philippians 2:3-4](#) • [Hebrews 10:24-25](#) • [Romans 8:28](#)

In heaven and earth. Do you guys know who I'm talking about? Caesar. I'm talking about a man named Caesar. Augustus Caesar, to be exact. In the first century, if you walked into the local restaurant in the Roman Empire and you asked, who do these titles belong to? The response would most definitely say, Caesar! The great and mighty, hail, Caesar! These were titles given to Augustus Caesar, especially after his father was deified after his death. He became the son of God. Can you guys turn the game down just a little bit? Really hot. Heralds were sent from town to town preaching allegiance to Caesar, sharing the good news of Caesar's ascension to the throne. You would hear the good news of Caesar as a good Roman citizen. You would bow down and pay your taxes like a good citizen. It didn't matter if you approved of Caesar or not. If you didn't bow, you were risking your life.

Some of these titles came to be associated with Yeshua by his own followers. Why would followers of a Hebrew God that believed in a Hebrew Messiah give him titles that had been attributed to a pagan king? It's a compelling question. Now, the uneducated would not bother to study the context or the hermeneutics of the scriptures and why this took place. They would just disregard it as, oh, it's pagan. I think they had a very good reason for attributing these titles to Yeshua, and we're going to discuss that today.

Caesar's Empire

The Roman Empire was ruthless. You guys know that, right? We've seen the movies. It was a whole different kind of world—strong military, strong allegiance. It was very ruthless when it came specifically to the Caesar cult, the imperial cult, the worship and deification of the Caesars, the emperors. Josephus recounts several instances where Pilate initiated slaughters of Judeans who would not yield to the fact that the Roman Empire had deified their king and that

they needed to accept that. Slaughters. [Luke 13](#) actually gives us a very mysterious glimpse into an account that we can't seem to find any other accounts that describe it, but Yeshua is speaking here, Luke chapter 13, verse 1, and it states this: "...there were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." And he answered to them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

And so Yeshua is speaking about an incident where Pilate, for some reason, not only killed some rebellious Galileans, but mixed their blood with the sacrifices. That's nasty. That's just evil, right? This was the world that Yeshua entered into. And so before we go any further, guys, if you want to study questions about this topic, maybe you want to look into it a little bit for yourself, I have some great resources—most of them I recommend. *Subversive Christianity* by Brian Walsh. It's a very compelling book if you like politics. It's just a nice short read. *The End of Religion, Encountering the Subversion Spirituality of Jesus*. I don't necessarily recommend this book, but I enjoyed reading it. *Holy Subversion* by Trevin Wax. I really enjoyed this book. It's about what it means when you become a believer, how you're forced to make a decision to no longer conform to the standards of the world around you. In fact, it's the opposite. Rebel in a specific way.

The Revolutionary Gospel

And then a lot of history we've already reviewed, I think one or two years ago when we did the Paul series in the message "Paul, the Revolution," which is available on the Founding Truth YouTube channel—a lot of the history about Caesar and the relationship between Caesar and Yeshua, the titles and how the contrast was such a big deal when Yeshua came into the world and when the followers came into the world, and when Paul said Yeshua was the Son of God, when he uses the word kurios, which is Lord, Lordship—I mean, that only goes to one person in Rome. That doesn't belong to Caesar, guys. It belongs to Yeshua. And so check that message out. It was definitely a very enlightening and fun study.

And so even the most zealous Judeans fell to the pressures imposed by Rome in the first century. They sacrificed, I think twice a day, on behalf of Caesar in God's temple in Jerusalem. Josephus talks about this. All of Rome were made to declare Caesar as God, and sacrifices were made daily on behalf of Caesar in the temple.

The Deification of Caesar

Now what's fascinating is Julius Caesar was the first emperor, and he really came in and did a lot for the kingdom. He really set up a system of government where the government was the provider of goods. He set up basically the first food assistance program, giving bread to the people, right? He created a lot of jobs. It happens when you go to war—just a lot of good things that benefited the citizens. And after Julius was killed, Augustus Caesar took power and Julius began to be known and associated with the gods. And so what did that make Augustus? It made him the son of God. Thus, he had a divine nature. And so from that point forward, the emperors were deified. They were a god, if you will.

And even the priests, even the Sanhedrin, even the most loyal to God in the first century were forced to say, alright, twice a day we're going to take a sacrifice to the altar and we're going to say on behalf of Caesar we offer this offering. Now it doesn't seem like that big of a deal. But if you made a sacrifice on behalf of Noah, you wouldn't care, because Noah isn't considered a god in the pagan world. Caesar was. This was a big deal that's not talked about very much.

An Infected Religion

The religious system of the first century was not simply different sects of Judaism, but an infected religion, unfortunately, because of the world around it. The pressure was too much in certain areas. No wonder Yeshua had so many different things to say about different aspects of the religious system. It was fascinating. And so this is the cultural background in which Yeshua comes on the scene.

In this highly charged and oppressive atmosphere, a group of men and women begin to advance the message about a Messiah, an anointed one. An anointed what? An anointed king that was crucified. And he rose again. This was the gospel message that was meant to be heard in all nations. So you had these apostles—apostolism means the sent ones, right?—once they were sent out. You had these apostles, and they took to the streets of Rome, boldly entering cities as heralds and sharing the gospel, the good news about a Jewish Messiah's lordship. Not just over Rome, but over all of creation. Forget Caesar's claim to the throne over Rome. Who cares about that? Caesar was known as the one who brought peace on earth because he ended a civil war that he actually started. He ended a big civil war, a tri-state civil war, and he was victorious in it. And so when he conquered the throne, it was like, oh, he's brought peace by killing everybody. Yay, now we have peace. So what? Forget Caesar. We have someone greater now. Let me tell you about the true Kyrios.

A Better Gospel

These heralds had a new gospel, a better gospel, the real gospel, the good news that was being shared. Something about it, something about it in the first century—it wasn't complicated. It wasn't something that you had to sit down and convince people of. It wasn't something that you had to sit down and say, hey, I know you've never read the Bible, but let me show you the Hebrew in this Bible, and I'm going to show you the prophets. It wasn't something where you had to spend days and weeks as a pseudo-seminary teacher to show someone the power and the reigning of Yeshua. It was something that when it was heard, it had an impact. It was something powerful that took place. And it spread like wildfire.

Yeshua was the true Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth. Do you know what the creed of these Yeshua followers were? Want to know what their creed was? It's very simple. Yeshua is Lord and God raised him from the dead. That simple. Yeshua is Kyrios. Whoa, that's Caesar's title. Caesar who?

The True Lord

We see something that a lot of believers struggle with—the boldness of Yeshua followers giving titles and phrases that were given to God himself throughout the Old Testament, right? [Acts 4:12](#), we say, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there are no other names under heaven and earth to which mankind must be saved." Speaking about Yeshua. Well, [Joel 2](#) says that's God. So now they're saying that it's Yeshua. [Philippians 2:10](#), "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Everything. Everyone's going to bow at the name of Yeshua. [Matthew 28:18](#), the boldness of this statement is so chilling. I love it. "All power and authority of heaven and earth has been given to me." This is Yeshua speaking. That's a bold claim. Revelation says Yeshua is the first and the last. Isaiah says that God is the first and the last.

See, these titles and references were not just derived from the Judean mindset of the first century—the teaching of the scriptures of God and God's nature. They were also fully confronting the Caesar worship that was rampant in the first century. When you start attributing the power that Yeshua had to Almighty God as if he was the actual vessel of Almighty God on earth, Caesar worship, the cult of Caesar, suddenly doesn't seem like such a big deal.

The True Savior of the World

What a bold claim. The disciples were making it very clear that the savior of the world, guys, was not the king of Rome, who provided peace for the nation and pacified the people with bread. The true savior is a man by the name of Yeshua, the one who restores us to God and our neighbors. The Savior who offered his body as the bread of eternal life. Controversial teaching that was. The disciples recognized that Yeshua was the true Lord of the world. And they were going around the most powerful empire in the world proclaiming that Caesar was a phony. He was a parody of the one true God.

The simple message spread via word of mouth. What we call Christianity began to burst through the Judean borders and even the Judean culture that surrounded it into all the world, to Assyria, to Persia, to all the world. Just as Yeshua had proclaimed to his disciples, you go to all nations and you teach what I have taught you. You proclaim what you have seen.

The Ekklesia Rising Up

Churches, or ekklesia, if you will, begin to rise up, not just in Ballantyne and the richest parts of the Roman Empire. They begin to pop up in the deepest, darkest corners of the entire Roman Empire. You guys know ekklesia. You've heard the word before. It's a Greek word that we translate into church nowadays, right?

And it's fascinating because in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, it's the same word that's used when all of Israel is called together as an assembly, right? That word is used there as one assembly. So when they came together for the feast or when they were at Mount Sinai and they came together as an assembly, one assembly, one under one, right? Before God, it was Ecclesia.

But in the first century context, in what was happening in the New Testament, it was not simply speaking of Israel coming together as one assembly. Matt, how do you know that? Because there was not just one Ecclesia in the Roman Empire. They started popping up here and there and there and there and there and there. Ecclesia of Jerusalem, right? Ecclesia here, Ecclesia there, Ecclesia in Corinth. It wasn't just one ecclesia. It wasn't just one assembly.

A Legal Governing Body

It's fascinating because in the first century, in the Roman culture, if you will, ecclesia had a legal scope on it. It was a legal governing body, if you will. When an ecclesia came together, it was kind of like Congress coming together, if you will, right? A house coming together, right? An assembly of who coming together. An assembly of what coming together. A legal assembly of

what was coming together and popping up all over Rome. A legal assembly of Yeshua, of the kingdom of God. When we gather together, Greg can tell you, there's power. There is authority when believers come together. Matt, why would you say that? Because we represent a kingdom that we have been given a stake and a banner that has authority to carry forward. We're a legal governing body of the kingdom of God right now. We represent it legally. And this is what was popping up all over the Roman Empire. What a rebellion against the most powerful empire in the world.

Now, as Rome began to expand through war, enslaving all the nations around them, it's fascinating because the Yeshua following grew when they proclaimed freedom from slavery, freedom from sin, to the nations that just became enslaved by this Son of God. Perfect combination. You're going to enslave that nation? We're going to go in there and free them.

Subverting an Empire

As the Caesars offered a government plan to give bread to the hungry, something began to change. A subversion began to happen among the believers. They began to upstage the ruling class of Roman citizens by selling their own belongings and feeding the poor themselves. You don't have to rely on this Caesar to give you... We'll help you out. They began to approach slaves and they did something radical. They treated slaves as brothers and sisters of Messiah.

We discussed in the past that Rome's entire economy and livelihood depended on the wide gap between the wealthy citizens and the poor, if you will. There was not really a middle class in Rome. We were talking last night. The top 3%, you've heard of the 1%, right? The top 3% in Rome owned 95% of the wealth of the empire. 5% was left for the 97% to distribute among themselves. Think times were tough, huh?

And then here come these Yeshua freaks. Here, I'll just sell. Hey, let me sell my car for you. You guys need bread? Your family needs bread? Hey, let me sell my furniture. I'll buy you some bread, no problem. But that's all you got. The Father gave it to me, and now I give it away for you in the name of the Father. That way I can be a vessel of his message of love for you. This is how the Father's kingdom works. Let me tell you about it.

The Christians subverted the entire Roman Empire, the economy, and the sense of patriotism by voluntarily selling their own belongings, giving them to the needy.

What Caesar Gets and What Belongs to God

Now, the early believers also understood that Caesar was still in charge. They weren't leading a revolt against the Roman Empire, per se. They understood that not only was Caesar in charge, but that God put him there and God gave him power. What they were subverting was when Caesar was trying to take honors that belonged to Yeshua. And that's something that the early believing movement would not tolerate.

You guys want to see a striking, striking story? So in Mark chapter 12, we have a very familiar story. And a lot of the Pharisees, some of the Sadducees, weren't too fond of Yeshua. Not all of them. Some of them dug him a little bit. Pretty cool guy. A lot of them didn't for many, many different reasons. And so one of them says, "Teacher, these men said, we know how honest you are. You are impartial and you don't play favorites. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us, is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?"

Do you think this was a sincere question for Yeshua? They were trying to trap him. Should we pay them or should we not? Then Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Whom are you trying to fool with your trick questions? Show me a Roman coin and I'll tell you." Well then, Yeshua said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to him, but everything that belongs to God must be given to God." Hand him a coin, and he asks, "Whose picture is that in the front? Is that God's picture? It better not be. No, whose picture is on front? And what's that say in the back right there? What's that say in the back? Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and everything else. Give to God."

The Coin That Exposed the Blasphemy

This reply completely amazed him. In Tiberius, and then most likely in Judea as well. And on the left, you have a striking young man here, and it says Caesar Augustus. Augustus Caesar, right there. And on the right side, it says, Devi Phileas, son of God. Should we pay with Caesars? Should we, Yeshua? You got a coin? Yeah, I got this one. Whose face is on it? Augustus Caesar. What's it say in the back? Son of God. I would give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.

I found that fascinating. You can almost hear the audience, ooh, in the background.

How could first, second, and third century believers act this way? Stay loyal to a leader and country while also subverting the country's exploitation of its own people.

Powers and Principalities

Because the early believers understood a principle that Caesar wasn't the ultimate enemy. They understood that powers and principalities stood behind the worldly leaders. The leaders themselves were just a puppet. The Caesar worship of the day was indicative of a power beyond mere men. It pointed to the evil one, if you will, who seeks to keep people enslaved and in bondage to sin and death.

Rome did not care if Christians spoke about a personal savior. Ask him into your heart. I don't care. Or spoke about the need of a relationship with Yeshua. Rome didn't care. Rome was concerned about the testimony that was spreading, about what happened that Sunday morning after this guy was crucified and died. Rome was concerned about the stories that were going around saying he was raised from the dead, which somehow inaugurated him into a lordship, a king. And now they're saying he is king even over Caesar. And then these people are starting to give him the titles that Rome had implemented for their king.

How long do you think it took for things to go downhill fast? It really went downhill with a man by the name of Nero.

The Forsaken Gospel

As we spoke last week, the gospel that was preached was less about asking Yeshua into your heart and more about inviting people into God's community, His kingdom where His heart is represented and lived out. That's the forsaken gospel.

What was the anticipated future of God's kingdom to the early believers? What did they anticipate would happen? All right, we're saved. What's that mean? I have a relationship with God. What's that mean? The exile's ended. What's that mean?

They believed God would one day bring a full restoration into the world that was so utterly broken around them. All of creation would be redeemed and the faithful who had died would be resurrected. And get this, they'd get some glorified bodies. That sounds fun.

The Future Already Here

The most encouraging aspect, though, of their message that they preached so zealously in the first three to four centuries was that they believed that this future had already broken into the present. The work of restoration and redemption, the green light had come on. It had started through the work of Yeshua. The age to come had arrived. It was present, in a sense, in the

current world. It was present through the believers. Little pockets, little pockets of the world to come walking around.

Even though the world was still ruled by God-hating dictators and oppressors, believers clung to the unshakable faith that Yeshua had already, in fact, become the ruler and that the faith would one day be seen by all. In other words, the whole world one day, despite what's going on right now, despite the persecution, despite the world-hating leaders that are out there, one day everyone's going to see him. Well, how do we know that? Because we know that every knee will bow. Everybody's going to see him one day.

It's our job to live out his kingdom now. It's our job to represent his kingdom now. One day everyone will see it. If they don't see it right now, that's not my problem. That's not my agenda. It's not something I'm going to get mad at. I just have to do my best to represent and carry his banner—the banner of his kingdom, the banner of restoration, the banner of forgiveness, the banner of God's love, the banner of reconciliation. That's my job right now. It's my job to represent his reign and his rule on earth as it is in heaven. It's my job to represent the intersection where heaven has met earth through the son of God.

Representing His Reign

Yes, I know when I get excited about the gospel, and I do. I know I've been excited about it recently, and praise God for that. I'm not ashamed of that. I know that I've even had some people online message me, "Hey, you're sounding really churchy with your messages." Guys, if I sound churchy because I'm talking about the power and the reign of the Son of God, Yeshua the Messiah, then so be it. Because that's the message that saves.

Guys, we walk out holiness by following the Torah. We walk out holiness by representing God's kingdom, by honoring the Shabbat, by not eating little shrimp and pork. I mean, this is easy stuff. Easy. We acknowledge the feast days the best we can, right? We look to Torah for the guidelines. I say the minimum standard of what a believer should be keeping. We look to that. Guys, that's the easy stuff.

Love Without Limits

The harder stuff is when Yeshua said, "I know what the Torah says. You hate your enemy. Take him to court. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Pluck your eye out. Man, get that ice pick." Not really, but you know. Equal weights and measures, right? Someone breaks your arm—accident,

whatever—they have to supplement you with the value of whatever that is. If someone attacks you, man, they owe you something. And you're rightful to claim it.

But I say to you—chilling words whenever Yeshua says that. Chilling. But I say to you, I'm going to tell you a higher expectation than I'm going to have of you. Love your neighbor and your enemy. Yeshua would say, "What? Pray for your enemy."

My enemy disappears from the face of the earth. I pray that he's raptured, far away from me, never to see him again. That's the prayer that our flesh wants to pray, right? If we got to pray, I'll pray. I can get on my hands and knees. I don't like this guy. Father, may he have fleas of a thousand camels. Yes.

That was not the context of what our king said the kingdom of heaven and earth—heaven on earth—would be like. He said, "Yeah, you've heard it said. You can take them to court and you can continue to hate them. But I'm saying to you, if you truly want to fulfill the heart of the Father, not just the minimum requirements, if you want to stand in what the Father had always intended for an image bearer to carry from the beginning in the garden, you pray for your enemy."

When you pray for something, do you typically pray for curses? You pray for blessings, don't you? You pray for your enemy. You bless your enemy. You show love to your enemy. You show your enemy that hatred will not overtake you because hatred is a product of the fall. Hatred is a product of the flesh. Hatred is a product of Cain, not the man that God formed out of the dirt originally, and not of his son Yeshua. You do not hate your neighbor. You do not hate your enemy. Such a hard saying, isn't it?

Sure, what about divorce? Guys, we see very clearly. It's right there in the Torah. "What do you think, Yeshua?" [Deuteronomy 24](#)—it says it right there. Yeah, the Torah says you can divorce. That was put in there because of the hardness of your heart. In the garden, divorce wasn't something that was around. The Father's heart is that there would be no divorce. The Father's heart is that the husband would love his wife. The Father's heart is that the wife would love her husband. The Father's heart is that the husband would be a servant and a helpmate and a respecter of the woman that he is in covenant with. The father's heart is that the woman would see herself as a helpmate to coexist as one with her husband. That's the father's heart. That there would be no need for divorce. That you would shape up and understand your role that you committed to in covenant.

The Cost of Discipleship

You see how all of a sudden, when you're looking at Yeshua and he's stating these things, sure, we have the Torah. It's almost like a minimum, like that's the bar. You can pull yourself up above that. I never noticed something until recently. Every single time when Yeshua had something to say and he was preaching to the masses, it was as if he wasn't really trying hard to get people to be like, "Yeah, I want to do that." I mean, every single instance he's like, "Are you sure you want to follow me? Because it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy because of the world that you live in and because of the people that will reject you. And the gospel that you will carry on your shoulders will be offensive to the world."

Carry your cross? People knew what that meant. It wasn't a metaphor. Literally, revolutionary gospel? Probably going to die and get crucified, which was the price a revolutionary paid in the first century. Never meant to be easy. Will you be a follower of the king in a world that rejects him? Totally went off into right field.

What would it look like today if we reclaimed the subversive nature of the original Yeshua community? And there's two ways to understand the word "subversive," or to subvert. And one way defines it as overthrowing a government. You're going to subvert the government, right? A great film—and I'm going to call myself out here—had Patrick Swayze in it and Jennifer Grey in it. It was called Red Dawn back in the 80s. Anybody ever seen Red Dawn back in the 80s? It's a classic. I love classics.

Understanding Subversion

Jennifer Grey had a great moment in that scene—her climactic moment in the movie where she held something tight and gave it to a few people at the end. Really cool scene. But basically the movie is the Russians and... what was it? Mexico joined forces? Cuba? It was Cuba. Cuba joined forces and invaded the U.S., right?

You've got parachutes coming down and the Wolverines. I guess it was in Michigan. Was it Michigan? Colorado? Wolverines? I don't think. Where was it? I don't know, Washington, Colorado. It was out there. And so all these high school kids are in their school, and they're seeing all these skydivers coming down and landing in the field. And they're like, "What is this?" And so they're going out to investigate, and these are paratroopers from Russia and Cuba, and they start opening fire. They're trying to get everyone down and show that, "Hey, we're attacking."

And so you have these football players or something, a whole group of students that hop in a four-wheeler, and they escape. They're getting shot at, and rah! They end up going to a gun shop

and getting some supplies, and they hide out on the mountain for months, and they realize that they have to fight because their whole town has been taken over. They see their families being put in camps and everything. It's their job at this point to subvert this oppressive force that has come upon their kingdom or their nation. And so they start using guerrilla warfare. That's a fascinating movie. I digress.

But regardless, they wanted to subvert. They needed to overthrow this oppressive force that had overtaken them. So that's one definition of subversion, if you will.

Another way of looking at it means to push something back down into its place. So if something has risen up beyond what it was ever supposed to be, or it has kind of encroached into other areas that it shouldn't be, you push it back down. "Get back down there. You don't belong here. You belong down there." I'd like to focus on the latter definition.

Subverting the Darkness

Because when we talk about the gospel being subversive, it most definitely is. The world was never supposed to become what it is today. Our flesh has a place and encroaches into many areas that we allow it to encroach, furthering us from the ways of God. So how are we to be like Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey? We need to subvert the areas that are encroaching on God's kingdom. That's our job.

Why? Because we're part of a greater kingdom now. I have a verse here, [Ephesians 6](#), 12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities or principalities and powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." This is what we were empowered to subvert. Everybody understand? You have an opponent that seeks to crush, kill, and destroy. And we've been empowered with the tools and the tactics to subvert, to overthrow these things, to push them down by any means possible. This week I wanted to focus inwardly a little bit on the Caesars that we need to be subversive towards.

The Caesar of Self

The Caesars that are contributing to establishing their own kingdoms in our lives and preventing the true kingdom from filling our being. The first Caesar was the Caesar of self. As we live in a culture, the world we live in, especially in the West, has created an ecosystem of self-centeredness and self-love. Anybody realize that?

Everything is about me. And the world even realizes this, right? You ever went shopping online, right? Let's say you go on Amazon and check something out. And it's marketing, and it's brilliant. And how else would you market if you want to be profitable?

Keeping Up with the Joneses

You go on Amazon, check out a toilet or something, who knows. And then you go on Facebook, stupid thing. And you're scrolling through Facebook, and then you see an advertisement for toilets. They're watching me, right? It's tracking everything that you look at, everywhere that you go, everywhere that you might want to buy. Hey, here's what you wanted, here's what you just looked at. Don't you want to buy this?

Fascinating, the secular world encourages us to do something we like to call keeping up with the Joneses. Man, someone got a new car? Baby, we need a new car. Why? Is that a question? They have a new car. Someone got one of them new Yeti coolers? We need a Yeti cooler. Someone got a new TV? Man, but Troy got this new big TV and he got surround sound and he got the new Xbox. Jenny, I can't just—I got an Xbox 2. This has become a standard that the world pushes. Has it not? Has it not?

And so how do you keep up with the Joneses? You go to work. And you spend your time at work to make the paycheck, not to put your family first, but to buy consumer goods. For who? For you. It's the world we live in.

Be True to Yourself

You ever seen a lot of the most famous pop songs that we have? "Be true to who you are." Here's a more recent one: "Don't hide yourself in regret. Just love yourself and you're set. Baby, you were born this way." That is the music that is currently going through our radio speakers to our youth. That is the message. Hey, you don't need to change. Whatever you want to be, whatever you want to do, obviously God made you that way. Be true to yourself.

What's that song from the 80s? I think it was the 80s. "Listen to your heart." Right? It's been going on for a while. Christina Aguilera song. "Just trust the voice within." What? Voice within the Holy Spirit? That's not what she's talking about.

This is the message that our generation pushes in the West. This is not quite the same message that's pushed in the Middle East or Eastern countries, but specifically here. It's all about you.

And if this doesn't benefit you, then obviously it's not good for you. That's the default setting for the human's outlook on life—self-centeredness.

We're Naturally Self-Centered

Do you guys have to teach your kids to be self-centered? No. No? I'm learning. My boy's almost two. And it inspires me because sometimes he'll be playing with other kids and he'll do something that is against human nature. He'll pick up one of his toys and he'll walk over and give it to another kid. And I'm over here like... And then the other kid will walk a few steps away with it and he will flip out. It's mine! And he'll yank it back. It's mine!

We're naturally self-centered. That's in our nature.

We think the world exists for... Who? Who? Us. For me, for I. And the sad thing is that this mentality usually is not checked at the door when you become a believer in the West. Usually it's not even a thing. Usually we become a believer and it's like, "Jesus died for this guy. He is my personal Savior. He's in my heart. The kingdom is about me." And this is the attitude that so many believers still have. Even mature believers, we get trapped in this thought.

Made Just for You

So you continue walking along viewing everything existing for you. And then you join a fellowship. And what is the purpose of this church or this fellowship or this congregation? It's to serve you. It was made just for you. That's why you joined it. You never view it as a community. You never view it as being a part of something bigger. You never view it as a family.

If you have this mentality, this mindset, what is the fellowship doing for me? Maybe I can benefit. I. What is it going to do for me? So I keep coming because it does stuff for me. It becomes an object, if you will.

And the moment conflicts that tend to happen in families arise. Anybody ever had a little bit of drama in their home, their family? Right? I mean, nobody. Johnny, a little bit. Me, a little bit. Two, three people. Man, I want to come visit y'all's house.

Right. Sometimes you have a conflict—sometimes that's a nice way of putting it, right? Any family is going to have a conflict. Any family gets very comfortable and lovey-dovey with each other, and sometimes it hurts people's feelings. But as a family, you get the hurt feelings, and then you say, "Yeah, I love you still, and I love you too, because you're my brother, because you're my sister, fine, love you." And you're still a family, right?

Do Not Break the Community into Pieces

If you go into a fellowship that was made just for you and revolves around you, and the moment a conflict happens—as is natural in a family—obviously this is not a good fellowship to be a part of. So I'm going to leave. Anybody know what I'm talking about? Anybody had that attitude before? Just me? It's just me. Not here. Very blessed by you guys. I tell Jenny all the time, I just can't believe how blessed we are to be a part, not leadership, just a part of the family here with you guys. I'm very blessed to know each and every one of you.

So a fellowship I went to must be nine, ten years ago. I guess it's far enough out I can talk about it. I was 21 years old, and some drama happened at the fellowship. And even at 21 years old, I understood that the issue that caused the drama was not that big of an issue. It just wasn't that big of an issue. But for some reason, the fire grew and I was just in a... How is this happening? I don't understand.

I think six or seven families left the fellowship. That's a big deal. This offense went on and it fueled this resentment and these families no longer felt like the fellowship could serve them anymore.

Matt, did they go and find another fellowship? To be part of another family or something? No, they sat at home. They didn't even congregate together.

And I found that so amazing when I was 21 years old that an offense could do so much damage under the right circumstances and the right mentality.

Guys, if you ever get offended at a fellowship and you really think that it's not the right place for your family to be anymore, I get it. Please, I beg of you, find another group of people to be a part of. Do not break the community into pieces. Don't sit at home. Find something else to be a part of because that's what we're supposed to be doing. That has nothing to do with this message. But I just want to say—please.

Families with No Fellowship

It's heartbreaking to see families that have an offense and... they feel so much anger or resentment that they literally just sit at home. These families tried to start their own little fellowship or group together, and then it fell apart a few months later because of the same type of issues. And it was heartbreaking to see—the offense aside—that families with children had no fellowship to attend because an offense could not be viewed as something that we can still love each other and get over as brothers and sisters in Yeshua.

And ultimately, we look at salvation. If we continue this mindset of us and we don't check this mentality at the door, ultimately we see salvation and we see God existing solely for me, for our glory. And we make the mistake of imaging God after us.

God Exists to Meet My Needs

Sociologist Christian Smith has done extensive research on religious beliefs in American teenagers and the youth that we have today. And he found that most teenagers—I'm going to read it here—most teenagers today liken God to a divine butler or a magic therapist. By and large, young people believe that God exists to meet my needs. God exists to help you become a better you by awakening the spark of life inside of yourself.

Now, the understanding that we as individuals do need help on our journey of faith—and this only comes from God. That's, of course. The issue is thinking once you are a better person, you made it. Forgetting completely that it was never about you. It was about the world around you. It was about creation. That belonged to who? It was about the body of believers around you. And it was about all of us becoming servants to each other and the world to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. That's the mission.

So we ask God to help us and we ask God to give us the tools that we need so that we can work, not so we can just be perfected and stop and be this model of a believer.

The Mindset of Self Is Not New

The mindset of self is not new. As I mentioned last week, the early believers battled something called Gnosticism in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries specifically. Gnosticism was a fascinating concept. It was heresy, but it was just a fascinating mindset. I mean, sometimes we bump into people that are kind of out there in their beliefs, right? Sometimes.

These guys were like Gnostics. And Gnostics taught that salvation was only found in secret knowledge that could only be taught by special teachers. And the world had missed it. The world had missed this ultimate knowledge. They'd missed it. We know it.

The Gospel Centered on God, Not Self

But we have the truth, and salvation ultimately didn't come from God in the Gnostic community. It came from within oneself through this secret knowledge that I acquired. I dare say sometimes we get so close to reinventing Gnosticism. We have to subvert this Caesar, this

self-identity that everything is about me. The gospel is not centered around you. This is the message. Guys, the gospel was not centered around you. It was centered around Yeshua. Salvation does not originate from you. It originates from the heart of Almighty God. Salvation is a pure gift from God, not from you. God saved us in order that we would take part in community of believers, which we call his kingdom and his body.

And so I want to read a little bit of scripture written by Paul about this specific Caesar of self. It's in [Ephesians 1](#). And if you would turn there with me, I think you will find a lot of things that maybe you've never seen before. And hopefully this will be encouraging. Yes, the point of this message is how we can understand the attitude that we're supposed to have towards our flesh. Because so many times we like to study God's word and we don't like to apply it. Sometimes it's easier to just study God's Word and not apply it. Sometimes it's easier just to say, wow, look at this secret knowledge I got. Let me just share this with all my friends and look like I know something and not apply it. Guys, are you going to hire someone that has a lot of book knowledge to lead a mission? Are you going to hire someone that has adjusted their character to fill the role of said mission? That's what we're studying today.

And it starts with understanding God—that the kingdom of God is not about you. So Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3. Oh yeah, that's tiny. Hope you brought your Bibles. Verse 3.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (that's the ESV version), who has blessed us in Messiah with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Amen. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Yeshua Messiah, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose. And he set forth in Messiah as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth, are going to be what? United in him. Through who? Verse 1. In him you also, when you hear the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

This section of scripture is radically God-centered. You notice the emphasis? Him, him, his, him, he, him. You are called by God for him. You were given grace for him. You were adopted through Yeshua for his glory. That should change the way you look at life when you walk outside. I challenge you this week—if you remember nothing else: you were chosen by God and

given grace by God and adopted as a son of God, a child of God, through Messiah Yeshua for His glory. In other words, he's looking down at you and seeing the tools that he's given you and seeing the renewed life that you have and he's watching how you're walking out. Hopefully he's smiling, saying, "Yes, my glory is exalted through them." That's a very humbling weight to carry on your shoulders, but that's the mission.

Salvation Comes from God Alone

Our salvation is from God. He says it's from God from the foundations of the earth. You were chosen. And His salvation extends over all creation, under all things in heaven and earth. You did not do this. Everybody say, I didn't do this.

With our selfish minds, we demand that our lives be wonderful right now, right? We want to be blessed right now. We deserve to be blessed right now. Why? Because it's all about us. We even get mad at God when we feel our lives have taken an unwonderful turn. Anybody ever gotten mad at God? I've gotten mad. I mean, let's be honest. Anybody ever gotten a little mad? Yeah, something happens in your life and you're like, well, this isn't a blessing. My life isn't wonderful right now. My life isn't. Why isn't my life wonderful? I deserve.

You guys ever seen a quilt? I thought they were silly until my wife started making them. And I was like, I could just make a few squares and glue them together or something. What's so difficult? And then I noticed how much time she spent on them. And I came in one day, and she says, yeah, I got the top finished. Like all these little squares. I don't know why. You just get a big square and sew it back onto it and you're done. No, that's not the point. She wants all these little itty-bitty pieces and they swirl and all this stuff, pretty stuff. And I walk in and I see thread. Looked like someone had gotten some nice big clumps of yarn and threw a grenade in them and then all over the kitchen table. And I'm like, this is done? She's like, yeah, it's done. That don't look done, babe. It looks like it's all messed up.

See, I was looking at the back of the quilt. In the back of the quilt, there's no organization. I mean, it looks nasty. And it goes over here, and it goes over there, and the thread over here, and then it's just everywhere. Mess of a tapestry just all over my kitchen table. I almost got irritated. This is what you spent the last month on? Sometimes, that's how we feel our lives look like. Sometimes, we're truly living in a mess. What is this? This isn't nice. But the believers understood that the picture that God is painting—the quilt that he's making—will be beautiful when he turns it over.

That's why the early believers sang songs as Nero burned them to death. This don't look like a wonderful life right now. But I know what's coming. I know the future. And they weren't necessarily just thinking about heaven. They were thinking about the future of creation. They understood that even if they were out in the middle of the desert starving, doing missions work, just to tell someone about the boldness of their king—man, I could really use a hamburger right now, but you know what? It's okay. I know what's coming. I know either right now, next week, next millennium, I know what's coming.

Threads in God's New Creation

God is going to flip this earth upside down. He's going to flip it over. And the fullness of the restoration of his new creation will illuminate all of creation. It will stand as a testimony of all time. And it's my job as a believer to be one of those threads. It's my job as a believer to be one of those threads. Do we have the boldness to walk out our lives as one of those threads? Understanding that the restoration—heaven is meeting earth—through every single one of us, carrying the banner that Yeshua planted, that he started.

Communities of faith are subversive when they place their own personal happiness aside and find joy in putting others first. It's very subversive against what the world tells us to do. Being a servant is not what you're supposed to be doing. You're supposed to be the boss. That's exactly what Yeshua did, right? Folks get excited about, I'm a new creation. You are a new creation, but it's not about you. You are a new creation in the new creation. You're a piece of it. And that puts a different emphasis on what we're supposed to be doing, or at least the mindset that we're supposed to be having when we walk outside.

Author Trevin Wax points out that we strike out with three total strikes after reading Ephesians with the false mindset that the universe exists for us. And I'll conclude with this. He calls it the Ephesians road. So the Romans road—what we just read—Ephesians road strikes out the self and places it in its proper place.

The Three Strikes of Gospel Centrality

Strike one takes place when we see that salvation starts with God and the gospel message that's all about Yeshua. Strike two occurs when we realize that salvation is all of God's grace, and we have nothing to contribute in that regard. Strike three happens when we understand that God has saved us in order to place us in a community of faith that will be a blessing to the nations,

to the world. You're a worker bee. Congrats! You're not the queen, but I'm okay being a worker bee.

The salvation of God is for us, but the Father has chosen us, and Yeshua's blood has purchased us. We are adopted orphans. That is what Ephesians says. Salvation is given to us. The Holy Spirit stirs our hearts so that we come to faith in Yeshua Messiah personally. We are forgiven sinners. Salvation is also through us by carrying the message forward. The world will be blessed by the good deeds we do in the context of a community of faith. We are commissioned communities. Fit is a commissioned community.

And so I want to leave you with this this week. Instead of asking God for things, ask God to allow you to do things if you dare. If you dare put that on your plate. If you dare take up that burden on your shoulders. Ask God to place you in a position that he would want you to be a servant in the world. That he would want you to be a thread in the beautiful new creation that he started. Even if you've got to go through some layers and go around and go do a couple twirls and do a knot. Even if that's what it takes, I dare you. Ask the Father what it would take for you to be a servant in your kingdom.

I spoke to someone last week. We were talking about the idea that sermons are just something that is worthless and that we should just be studying the Bible and reading the Word of God word by word and getting our Strong's Concordances out and opening up Esword. That's how we should study God's word. Sermons are worthless. That's just a general church tradition that's been replicated over time and time and time.

And then it was brought up in our conversation. Yeah, that's why Yeshua taught in parables. Yeshua didn't break open a strong synchordance. Never. He barely quoted scripture. I mean, a parable. I got a story. I got a sermon for you guys.

As the gospel went forth from Zion through the mouths of the believers and overtook the world, not because they carried around a strong concordance with them and showed them, ooh, look at this Hebrew word here. That came after.

Your Tongue Has the Power

I want to encourage you. We have the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are awesome, and the Scriptures are the gift from God, but we also have the message of reconciliation that has been imparted on us as a part of our job to be missionaries or messengers of reconciliation, ambassadors of Yeshua. Your tongue has the power of the boldness of Christ to spread that

message that has impacted billions of lives. Will you dare to pray that the Father allows you to use it despite the cost?

I'm going to have to continue this message for time's sake, but I dare you to ask that of the Father this week. If you're serious, if you're serious...

I Dare You to Pray

It's so easy to pray to the Father. Father, I pray for healing for this. Father, I pray for financial freedom in this. Father, I pray for air conditioning to blow a little bit colder. So easy. So selfish. Father, it's a new day. You've given life to me. I don't deserve it. I know what your word says. I'm alive today because you chose me from the beginning. Father, how honored I should be. Will you use me today? Not just as an example, but as a servant today. I dare you to pray that prayer this week. And if you dare, I guarantee you will see what the Father will change in your life. And you will see the manifestation of that prayer. Amen.

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