



Exodus (Part 26) – Falling into Forgetfulness

Matt Chandler – April 16, 2017

[Video]

From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. The story of Israel is the story of us today. We are God's people. He draws us out to draw us in, and, like the Israelites, we still await the Promised Land in the midst of our sin and suffering, yet God is with us.

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Good morning. Happy Easter. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Exodus 32 is where we're going to be. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. Let me just right out of the gate tell you where we're going. I'm going to take the next 30-ish minutes, and I want to tell you the story of the world. That's my plan.

I want to tell you the story of the world, the story that lies on top of every other story that has ever been told, including your story and mine. It's a story that lies on top of all other stories and helps define and bring clarity to those stories. My plan is in 30-some minutes... If you're a member of The Village, I know you're probably smirking at that idea, but I'm confident that in the next 30 minutes I can unpack for you the story of the world, including you and me and our story.

Since August, we've been in the book of Exodus. We've been in that book a long time. Here's what we've already covered. Quickly, let me catch you up on 27 previous weeks. What we've picked up on is that God is gracious and kind and good, that he is a good God who initiates and moves toward his people. He doesn't move away from his people, but he moves toward them to save them, deliver them, and give them the one thing their hearts actually need.

We've come in here today, and we have all sorts of felt needs that are present. Maybe marriage is difficult. Maybe we have a kid who's wilding out. Maybe we just found out we're sick. Maybe there's

\$3.25 left in the bank account. We have some felt needs, and yet the Word of God would put a little pressure on us today that although those might be symptomatic of greater realities, what you need most is the presence and power of God. Our souls were created by a creator, and they will be restless until they find rest in him.

What we've covered since August is how God moves toward us, how he's generous, how he's gracious, that he saves us from bondage, that he pulls us toward freedom and away from slavery. He pulls us toward life and away from death. It is God who started that and who moved toward us to accomplish that, and that is the bedrock of the story. The story that sits on top of every other story, including your life and mine, is that God is good, he is kind, and he moves toward us in generosity.

Now we haven't tried to make it prettier than it actually is. We've been really honest about the fact that because God is God his "Godness" sometimes is hard for us to understand and comprehend. There are things that play themselves out in our lives that can be very confusing to us, and if we were God we would actually do things differently. We've been really honest that God's plan is a good plan, but it will rarely play itself out like we think it's going to. Do you know why? Because he's infinite and we're not.

If we could establish any kind of humility as human beings, we would be able to swallow that with a bit more graciousness. God is infinite. He has always been. He will always be. He is unchanging. He's going to operate differently than we. I'm self-aware enough to know I would make a terrible god. My mood can fluctuate on a dime. I can love you and dislike you in a couple of seconds, but God doesn't operate like that. He's unchanging. He's infinite. His word is his word is his word. We take refuge in the fact that he is unchanging.

Sometimes, as we read earlier in the study, God had the people of Israel march the long way around toward the wilderness. Why? For their good. Anybody feel like sometimes God took them the long way? My hand is up not as an example to you but as a testimony that there have been times going, "Okay, God, I got it. Surely we're there. Are we not there yet? I kind of learned. I know the lesson you're trying to teach me." Sometimes God takes us the long way around.

The bedrock, though, of the story...act one, if you will...is God's kindness, his mercy, and his initiating love toward us. The people of Israel cried out in their oppression. Not to God. They just cried out, and God responded. God heard them. God saw them. God delivered them. God provided for them. God made a way to give them what their heart most desperately needed: himself.

Even in the last few weeks we've been covering this. The idea of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is the presence of God dwelling among men, and yet it's a weak picture of what was to come in Christ. Then we looked at the priestly garments and the role of the high priest and the sacrificial system, all of which have been realized in the coming of Jesus Christ, so that as they would look toward us, they would look toward us with a great deal of jealousy.

Here they're putting on priestly garments, and we're clothed in the righteousness of Christ. They have access once a year into the Holy of Holies, and the Spirit of God dwells inside of us. We should never look back on Exodus and go, "Man, that's amazing," because everybody at *that* time would look toward us and go, "Dadgum, that's amazing. I'm jealous. We got a raw deal here." So act one is God's kindness and mercy toward us.

Act two could simply be titled *rebellion*. Now because most of us are Americans and because *Star Wars* is such a big deal (not to all of us; just to the nerds among us) there's something about rebellion that sounds right to us who grew up in a democratic republic. What rebellion is is fighting against the man. Rebellion is raging against a tyrant. Rebellion is pushing back against forces that would dehumanize and belittle our humanness. Rebellion is a good thing. It's shaking our fist at the man and not bending our knee to tyranny.

If that's what act two was all about, then that would be awesome, but what's heartbreaking, what is asinine is that our rebellion is not against a tyrant but against a good, gracious King who is offering us life, and we rebel instead to death. He offers us freedom, and we rebel against to slavery. What makes the rebellion of man against a holy God so insane is that we're rebelling against the one thing we were designed for. We're rebelling against the one thing our hearts crave and can't seem to find. That's what we're going to read about at the beginning of Exodus 32 and in the story that sits over our lives.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 32. **"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain..."** So a little stressor. **"...the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, 'Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' So Aaron said to them, 'Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.'**

So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.' And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."

This is rebellion against the kindness of God. Act one is God moving toward his people, offering life, compassion, grace, forgiveness, fullness of life, providing for his people. If you haven't been here, when they are freed from slavery by no act of their own but simply by an act of God, actually multiple acts of God, and get out into the wilderness, God begins to feed them by putting bread on the ground and dropping quail out of the sky.

It doesn't get more "provocious" than that. "Are you hungry? Walk outside." It was new every day, and it tasted sweet. If you wanted meat, there was quail right there for you, just God dropping it out of the sky to provide, to give, in his mercy, despite the fact this is a grumbling, complaining people. He just keeps approaching, keeps initiating, keeps extending kindness. Then in a moment of stress..."Where's Moses? Moses has been up there a long time" ...they freak out and rebel against the kindness of God and run back to what used to enslave them.

If you were here for the series, one of the plagues that got brought on Egypt to overthrow Egypt was a plague against all the livestock of Egypt, and the livestock died of disease. It was God's way of showing both Egypt and Israel that the little golden cow god the Egyptians worshiped had no power and was no god at all. Now Israel, the people of God, has run to this god that could not save Egypt and said, "You brought us out of Egypt."

Think of how offensive this is. God killed that god in clear, public ways. The livestock didn't die in private. They were dead all over the plains of Egypt, and the stench filled the air, and everyone knew this was no god at all. And what does Israel do the moment they get stressed? "We need a god. What about that little cow one? I mean, I know God killed him, but maybe he can rise back up and save us." Rebellion against God makes you act like a fool.

I'm not trying to be offensive to anyone in here. I'm just saying rebellion against God sends you toward worshiping things that cannot provide for you the things you're hoping they will. Now let's chat for a second, because this isn't just *the* story; this is *our* story. This is you and me. Everyone in this room, the guy with the face mic on too, often just wants the gifts, not necessarily the Giver. We want God's stuff; we don't necessarily want God.

If we're really, really honest and could be really honest (I'll explain what I mean by that sentence in a second), we just think we're smarter than God. We just think we know better. "We're grown folk. We know what's best for us." That message gets reinforced despite all the carnage around us. "We know what's best. We can choose for us." The rise of the autonomous self. "We don't need a babysitter. We don't need anybody telling us what to do." And we rebel.

We fail to acknowledge him for a thousand mercies he extends to us on a daily basis. We own it like *we* achieved it, like *we* did it, like *we* conquered it, like *we* overcame, like *we're* the ones who... Right? We build our little golden calves of relationships, and we start saying crazy things like *they're* saying right now. "Behold the spouse who delivered me from loneliness. Behold the children who have given me value. Behold the job promotion. Behold the car, the house, the bank account. Behold the watch. Behold the clothes that have saved me."

This is what we do. We ascribe divine attributes to the stuff of future garage sales. Listen. If you're not aware (and maybe this is too enchanted for you) that there's a kind of demonic spiritual power around new stuff, then you're not paying attention. It's crazy that new clothes, new car, new house, new phone makes you feel like a better person. It just does.

You get something new and for a moment you feel better. "I feel like I'm a better person." You're not. You just got a new watch. I'm telling you, it draws us in. It's our salvation, despite the fact our whole lives are filled with the fact that it doesn't work, but we keep going back to it. If that's not clear enough, look at how Aaron responds when he gets busted.

The Bible says, "Your sin will find you out." That means you have no secrets. You might think they're secret, but they're only secret for a season until in God's divine love for you he exposes you. When that happens, when our rebellion against the kindness of God is made visible to our selves or to others, we have this playbook that we pull right off these pages. Look in verse 21.

"And Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?' And Aaron said, 'Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, "Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So I said to them, "Let any who have gold take it off." So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.'"

You have to laugh there so you don't cry, because here's what just happened. He's confronted with his sin, and the first thing he does is blame someone else for it. "What did you do?" "You know these people." The impulse to convince ourselves that we're right and good is so powerful it does not take much for us to blame another for our sins. When we rebel against God and begin to reap what we sow, when we get exposed and outed for the frauds that we are, we will almost always have someone to blame for that behavior.

We see this all the time in marriages. "I know I'm not... But if you knew what she did, if you knew what he did, you would understand." God never understands that. Again, I promise I'm not in any way trying to be offensive. One of the most consistent conversations I'm having with my 11-year-old son right now is he chose to shove his 7-year-old sister; she didn't make him. No one can make you do anything. You're a grown person.

I want you to hear what I'm saying. You will be sinned against. People are going to sin against you, no one more consistently than your spouse and children. You're going to be sinned against. Your response to that sin is all you. Responding sin for sin never in God's eyes makes him go, "Oh, I totally get that. What choice did you have? You were sinned against. Honestly, what play did you have except to retaliate in kind?"

No, no, no. You can't blame others for your sin. You've chosen to respond to other people's sinfulness by sinning. They don't own that; you have to own that. That's one of the first things we do when confronted with our rebellion, but that's not the only thing we do. The second thing we do is we tend to justify. Again, the impulse to be right... We're not trying to preach to others. We're trying to convince ourselves that we're good people. The impulse is not just to blame others but to rewrite history.

I want to throw this before you. Maybe you haven't thought about this. I don't think Aaron knows he's lying. When Aaron says, "Oh man, I just took the gold and threw it in the fire and out came this

calf..." We giggled at it because it's so absurd, but 20 years of pastoral ministry has me sitting across people all the time who are saying crazy, absurd things that are so far from reality. It's like this reality distortion field they're walking in, but the impulse to be justified, the impulse to convince themselves that they're good and right is so powerful it trumps reality.

Despite all sorts of evidence, they'll swear that that's not what happened, that *this* is what happened. The deep, desperate need to be right is so powerful I'm not sure Aaron knows he's lying here. I think he started... "Man, these people, you know them. They're crazy. All I did... Gosh, there was so much going on. There was a large crowd, and they were all nipping at me. I just threw the gold. *Bam!* It just came out. What are we supposed to do? We have to worship. I mean, this gold came out of the fire." He's justifying.

The reason I can say this is our story is this is what we do. Think about it. When you hit a stressor in life, isn't it most easy to blame someone else for that stressor? Isn't it the easiest thing in the world for you to rewrite history as though you were the victim, as though you did everything right and everyone else was wrong? Nobody even has to be taught that. Like I said, I'm having this conversation with my small children. They learned it by being human. It was not their environment they learned it from. It was the fact that they're sinners from birth, bent toward iniquity, love to blame, love to justify. This is our story.

So you have God's goodness and his kindness moving toward us. You have us rebelling against that kindness in some of the most asinine, grievous ways imaginable. So what's God's response to that? Well, we live in 2017, so what I'm supposed to say is that God's response is just not to worry about that and sprinkle happy glitter on you and just bless you on to your own destruction. But that's not what the Bible says, and I would be cruel and unkind to you if I taught that.

God's response to our rebellion against his kindness is wrath. Look in verse 7. "**And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt...'**" By the way, that's the first time that's worded that way in Exodus. "*Your* people who *you* brought out." Historically it has been, "*My* people who *I've* brought out," and now it's like, "*Your* people. *You* brought them out." Let's keep reading.

"**...have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of**

Egypt!" And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.'"

A way that we can think about this, a way we can feel it viscerally... Just a few chapters ago, Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God, where God said, "Here's the path to life. If you want the fullest, richest life possible, here is the path," and they said, "I do," and they bore the sign of the covenant and entered into a covenant relationship with God. While on their honeymoon, they met another man and defiled the wedding bed with that other man.

God's response was not, "Yeah, that's cool." God's response was, "Hey, Moses, can you scoot over here for a second? I need you to scoot over, Moses. I'm going to keep my word and I'm going to build a mighty nation out of your line, but I'm killing everybody else." This is the wrath of God. God hates sin. He *hates* it. He's not indifferent, and if he *was* indifferent he is not good. God hates sin.

The effects of sin don't just destroy an individual. Sin corrupts not just an individual but generations along a bloodline. Giving ourselves over to rebellion against God joins the side of Satan and all that is meant to destroy what is beautiful, right, and good in God's creation. So God is not cool. God is not understanding. God does not look past any of that rebellion. He *will* destroy it. He *will* kill it. He will kill it once and for all in time.

He is not indifferent to any sin at any level, anywhere, ever. If he is, he is not good and he is no God at all. He would be most cruel if sin didn't bother him, but he's most high because he hates it. He *hates* it. It rots out our souls and then rots out the souls of our families and then rots out the souls of our generations and then rots out the souls of our communities and then rots out the souls of our states and then rots out the souls of our countries and then rots out the soul of the world until rebellion against life and freedom has left nothing but carnage, decay, and death.

We can say we don't understand the wrath of God, but turn on the news. The wrath of God is right to burn against sin. I think the way it looks in our context... There's a type of disease that attacks trees. It's a fungal disease. It's called *heart rot*. I didn't even make that up. It's just a gift from the Lord. It attacks hardwood trees, so big hardwood trees. Here's what happens. The fungus gets inside the bark, and there are no visible symptoms on the outside of the tree. It just begins to rot from the inside out.

What you get when heart rot starts to infest a tree is this massive-looking hardwood that looks like if you drove your car into it your car would lose... Don't think I don't know I'm in Texas and some of you have a F-250 and you're going, "You wanna bet? Bet me. Just point the tree out, bro." But what happens is it looks that way, but in reality, when heart rot has taken root, give it time, and a normal-sized man can just walk up and shove the tree over. It's this massive-looking hardwood that can't stand.

Let me show you a picture of heart rot. If we could zoom out, you have thick bark that looks really strong, and yet inside it's rotting away. Tell me that isn't DFW. We're a pretty people. We don't really have any natural rivers or mountains or anything to drive us outside, and I say that as one who has lived in other places. If you've grown up here your whole life you're like, "What do you mean?" Yet if you watch how we do life and how we constantly push out this faux self...

We have it all together. Our marriage is awesome. Our kids are amazing. My bank account is full. My home is happy, and we don't do anything but laugh and eat lavish meals. Follow people on social media. This is what we project nonstop. In the church, it lives just as strong. "How are you doing?" "Praise his name. I'm great." Or, "How are you doing?" "Oh man, I'm so blessed I can't even contain myself." Yet the projection of strength is actually heart rot.

It's not reality. It's not what's really going on, but it's what we've been taught to project. When you're projecting strength and internally you're in rebellion against God, sitting in his wrath, you're rotting out. We've all witnessed this. All of a sudden this mighty tree, this mighty oak, just falls over. You're like, "What in the world happened to that marriage? Oh my gosh! What happened to that person? We didn't see that coming."

The collateral damage of that thing falling down takes us all by surprise, makes us gasp, and yet the entire time, all the visible structures of strength, rotting from the inside out. This is what it's like to be in rebellion against God and to sit under his wrath. When people talk about the wrath of God they talk about it wrongly. It's not lightning bolts and tsunamis.

Romans 1 says he just turns you over to chase the things you want to chase and shouldn't be chasing. Romans 1 says, "Oh, you think your spouse would make a great god? Go ahead and chase them for that. Oh, you think money is going to satisfy you? Okay, go ahead." The wrath of God is often just letting you chase the things you want to chase, but it ends up with you being hollowed out and eventually collapsing.

I know some of you are like, "Man, it's Easter, Chandler." Okay, well, we aren't done. Act one is the kindness of God, act two is our rebellion against that kindness, act three is God's wrath because of that rebellion, and then finally we get to the atonement. Look at verse 30. **"The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'"**

The next part of the story that lies over your life, over my life, the story of the world, is that God, yet again, even in the midst of rebellion against his kindness and his wrath burning, moves toward his people. This is stunning and yet another reason why I would make a crummy god. Who can be this gracious? Who can be this gracious and not be defined as codependent? Only the King of glory.

What do we mean by *atonement*? *Atonement* means to pay the ransom for. Moses goes up and tries to do what Moses will be unable to do: pay for the sins of Israel. He goes up and pleads with God. "I want to make atonement. Please don't blot out the names of your people. Remember the promise you made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hold fast your anger," and God relents, because Moses is a picture of someone who is to come.

Moses cannot atone for the people of Israel, cannot atone for God's people, because he himself is a sinner. Just like the tabernacle was a picture of the coming of Jesus, and just like the sacrificial system and the priestly garb and the atoning work of the priests were pictures of Jesus who is to come, so Moses going up that mountain to make a way to be justified before God and have our sins atoned for... Moses is a picture of the greater Moses who is to come, Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes, he makes the atonement for our sin.

So I say, and I'm saying it all the time, because I want it to be in your head so in your day of doubt and struggle it'll play, like that song you can't get out of your head. All of your sin, past, present, and future, was fully, freely, and forever taken care of on the cross of Christ. His atoning work on the cross was so profound it didn't just burst into the future and forgive all of *our* sins but actually went backwards and picked up the sins of dudes in the past.

How is Moses righteous? Moses isn't righteous. The Lord isn't even going to let him into the Promised Land. How is Abraham righteous? He whores out his wife on three different occasions. How are you going to count that dude as righteous? King David? Are you serious? He's not

righteous. He couldn't work here. We wouldn't have given him a job. "Look, you rock that harp, but you won't leave dudes' wives alone. You killed like a thousand people. Get out."

How are they forgiven? How are they counted righteous? Because they believed in the one who was coming. So the effect of Jesus' death on the cross didn't just forgive all of *our* sins but actually picked up the sins of those who believed in the past that it was coming. They only knew a shadow of it. We have the whole picture. David just goes, "There's one coming, and his enemies are going to be his footstool," and God is like, "Okay, propitiation. I'm going to forgive your sins by the blood of Jesus who's coming in a couple thousand years." That's incredible.

Some of you avoid a deep intimate relationship with God because you walk in some shame, and that shame is actually attached to these moments. You have done some things that you can't believe you did, and they haunt you and make you feel dirty and make you avoid the Lord. "There's just no way." If you would use your imagination, here's how I would have you use your imagination in a redeemed way.

As they drove nails through the hands and feet of Jesus and as he screamed in agony and as they hung him there and his lungs began to fill with blood and as he grimaced, as he pushed up on that nail to gasp before he collapsed back down as he suffocated, what's happening in that moment is the shame and guilt for that action is absorbed by Jesus Christ who's atoning for that moment. You don't owe for that. It's been paid for.

Why do you think we're in here rejoicing like mad today? If you're stunned by the fact we're shouting and clapping and having a good time, we believe this is true. All of our sins have been atoned for. The things Matt Chandler is ashamed of... Here's what Matt Chandler can rejoice in: all that got nailed to the cross and died with Jesus. So now I'm standing here, according to the Bible, spotless, blameless in his sight. That's the invitation that's on the table: atonement, forgiveness for all of it.

How do we know? How do we know he got all of it? Because of resurrection, and that's the last part of the story. We don't see resurrection in chapters 32 and 33, but we do see it in chapter 34, which we'll get to next week when on Family Worship Weekend we talk about God of glory, God of mercy before our big family picnic out at Doubletree Ranch. You're going to want to come to that next weekend. It's going to be epic. It's going to be a good time, Flower Mound, so come join us for that right after services next weekend.

We'll be talking about God of glory, God of mercy. What we see as Moses goes up to make atonement and God covers that request in what's called *propitiation*, covering up the sins of the past by the blood of Jesus, is that the covenant is reinstated. God once again in kindness reenters the covenant with his people, and there's this spiritual resurrection that occurs.

Here's the story that lies on your life and mine, over the world, and every story you've ever heard. You can see it in every movie you ever watch. You can read about it in any book you read. God is good, kind, and gracious. We have rebelled against that goodness. We have chosen slavery and death over freedom and life. It doesn't *feel* that way to us because we justify and blame, but God even in his wrath made a way for those who believed in the atoning work of Jesus to be spiritually resurrected and then ultimately physically resurrected forever. That's the story.

So the question we have to answer today (and unfortunately you came, so you have to answer it) is...*Where are you in the story?* I want to try to create simple categories that I think are helpful. Some of you are in here and you're a Christian. You are filled with the Holy Spirit. You're not perfect. You would never claim to be perfect. You're pursuing the Lord imperfectly. You're stumbling.

You have some issues you're trying to work through, but you're trusting in the grace of God. You get up when you fall down. You rejoice that his delight in you does not waver, and you understand that he never regrets saving you. You're not perfect but pursuing. You're a Christian and you're rejoicing. You have much to rejoice in today as we celebrate the empty tomb. Jesus is alive, physically alive.

Others of us... Maybe you've been hanging around The Village for a while. Maybe some friends have been talking to you about Jesus, but your testimony is, "Yeah, I have a lot of questions. I'm not a Christian. I'm still trying to get to the bottom of this, still trying to figure it out, but I'm not a believer." But the one I want to talk about goes back to this heart rot idea.

One of the things I learned early on here in Dallas that my friends in New York City and Seattle and San Francisco never have to deal with is this really squishy middle. Here's what I mean. The only way I know how to describe the category is *religiously lost*. What happens so often here in this squishy middle is we know just enough Bible verses, just enough about Jesus to not need any part of him. It's called *inoculation*.

You just learn some pithy phrases about Christ. He kind of becomes a bumper sticker, but if we really had to be honest about your life, there's zero evidence in your life that you know him, you walk with him, or you've said "yes" to his lordship. What you know is that Jesus is King and that Jesus was born of a virgin on Christmas and that he rose from the dead on Easter, but the way that works itself out in your life is invisible. So, no real desire to follow him, no willingness to surrender your life to him, but you know enough to consider yourself a Christian.

I've for 14 years now brought this up, because these are real conversations I have. Many of you think you're a Christian because, seriously, when you were like 7, your parents posed you the question, "Do you want to burn in hell forever or do you want to come with us to heaven?" "Um...yeah, I'll go to heaven with you, Mom." From that moment forward, zero fruit in your life. Zero evidence that you've surrendered to him, that you love him, that you long to follow him, but still wear the banner.

I'm trying to love you here. I promise in no way am I trying to be offensive. In every way I'm trying to serve you. What do I have to gain in saying this? Nothing to gain, everything to lose, if our measurements are what drive me. If you have no desire to follow the Lord, nothing in you that longs to be obedient and to lay your *yes* down and follow him, I would not rest in calling yourself a Christian, because you by defining yourself that way have defined yourself outside of any way the Scriptures ever define it.

You've kind of created this category on your own that says, "I don't really have to follow him. I don't really have to submit to him. I can do whatever I want, and he's just going to sprinkle that happy glitter on me, and the wrath of God isn't on me," but what I'm trying to help you with is you are actually in rebellion, under wrath, trying to attach Jesus' name to it.

You certainly haven't fooled the Lord. I'm trying to love you. You certainly have not fooled the Lord. God is not going, "Man, they pop their head in a couple of weeks. He knows John 3:16. I heard him say it one time. A couple of times a week he says 'Jesus Christ.' I think he's into me." You just haven't fooled him.

The reason I'm giving you those three simple categories is I want you to have this moment of honesty between you and the Lord about where you actually are. I'm not talking to Christians who struggle. That's all of us who follow the Lord. There's still no one perfect. We're all in process. That's what progressive sanctification is all about.

I *am* talking to those of you who there's been zero progressive sanctification for as far back as the moment in which you say "I got saved" is. No life, no fruit, no pursuit, no desire to surrender. You do what you want to do, and you'll come to church once a year, twice a year, and put the banner of Jesus over your life. I'm just trying to help you see that you're actually in rebellion and under wrath.

What's on the table even today... Yet again the kindness of God moves toward you, not away from you. Can you not see that even being here today is yet another opportunity that God is laying before you of atonement and resurrection? Today the offer for you, even in your rebellion with Jesus' name on top of it, is life, freedom, and fullness *this* way.

Oh, that you could see and get a sense of that, that you could see straddling the two worlds makes you miserable in both. You will not be able to freely enjoy the licentiousness of the world because you know too much to be haunted, and yet you will not know the freedom and beauty of walking in spiritual presence and power. You harm and rob only yourself. The invitation today, not from me but from God himself, is move toward atonement. Lay your *yes* down. Experience resurrection.

Why don't you do me a favor? Why don't you bow your heads and close your eyes? If you're in Plano or Fort Worth or Southlake or Dallas, this is weird across camera, but go ahead and bow your head and close your eyes. We're just going to chat a couple more seconds, and we'll conclude our service.

If you're in here today and your testimony would be, "You know what? I'm hearing what you say. I know, I'm fully convinced, that the Spirit of God lives inside of me and that I am imperfect, but I have a love for God and I'm growing and I'm chasing him and I'm pursuing him..." If that's you, would you just raise your hand right now? "I know I'm imperfect, but God is doing a work in me." Just go ahead and raise your hand. Let's just celebrate that. Praise God for that. There are a lot of Spirit-filled people in this room. Praise God.

Now I think the next two might require a little bit more courage, but I want to encourage you to do that, to walk in that courage. If you're here today and you would say, "You know what, Chandler? I've been coming for a few months. I've been invited by friends. I've been having these conversations about Jesus with some friends and family members. If I have to be really honest, I haven't laid my *yes* down. I don't know that I'd call myself a Christian right now. I'm trying to get to

the bottom of it, but for now, in this moment, if you're asking the question, I'm saying I'm not a Christian..."

If that's you, would you just raise your hand? Just raise it high. You don't need to be nervous or anxious about that. You can just be bold and go, "That's just not where I am yet." Praise God. You shouldn't feel ashamed of that or anxious about that. All right, why don't you put your hands down.

Maybe you're here today and you would say, "Dang, Chandler. I'm a little anxious, because I think I might be in that squishy middle. I know some things about Jesus and I know some things about the Bible, but, man, not between you and me, Matt, because ultimately I don't know that I even like you, but between me and the Lord, if there's a God who sees my heart, I think I might be a religious lost person. I have no real relationship with God. I just know some stuff about him."

If you think that might be you, would you just raise your hand right now and go, "Oh my gosh, I think that might be me." Just raise that thing high. You should never feel ashamed of where your heart currently is. That helps us move forward. Praise God. Why don't you put your hands down. Now everybody just look up at me for a couple of more minutes. Here's what I want us to do today. I'm going to pray for us, and as I pray for us, there's going to be a group of men and women. They're going to come up front and just stand here.

When I say "amen," we're going to stand together and sing a little bit, but if you raised your hand and said, "Man, I think I'm in that squishy middle," I want you to come up here, because here's what I think we're going to find. I think some of you probably really are Christians. You maybe are a baby Christian or really immature, but we want to help you navigate that so you can leave assured today that the Spirit of God dwells inside of you.

If you raised your hand... There were many of you who raised your hand and said, "I've been coming. I have a friend telling me about Jesus. I just don't know. I'm just not sure I believe." Well, here's what I want to lay before you. I don't think you're ever going to have all of your questions answered. Gosh, I'm 20 years into following Jesus Christ, and a lot of my questions have been answered, and what I've found is that when my questions get answered they get replaced with new questions. Anyone else?

I'm like, "Got that one. Okay. Oh, dang! There's another one. Okay, what about *this*, then?" Then a question I never even thought about invades right as I get that one answered. What I want to

encourage you to do... You can still come to Jesus and lay your *yes* down as you seek to answer those questions, knowing that those questions will always be there. It's called *faith*. If you're still not even there, then you stay in your seat, but I just want to invite you. Why not today go, "You know what? I'm going to just say yes to Jesus, and then I'm going to start working this stuff out."

I know there will be a thousand reasons for you to stay in your seat and not do any of this. There is a spirit of cool and perception, that personified strength, that will not give up its hold on us easily. We want to be perceived as greater, smarter, more put together than we are. The good news of the public death of Jesus Christ on the cross is that he has outed us all. There is no one righteous, not one. No one is strong enough. No one is cool enough. No one is put together enough, so I got you.

I'm going to pray, they'll be up here, and then we're going to stand, and when we stand I want you to come. The longer you debate yourself in your chair, the more likely it is you'll do nothing with this. Please hear me. This is yet again God moving toward you. I don't even know if you came here today expecting God to be judgmental and angry. No, no. God is moving toward you even in this moment.

Don't harden your heart yet again toward him. He once again is moving toward you, once again pressing in. Why not surrender today? If you don't, I'm sure you have your reasons, but the invitation is out of rebellion, out of wrath into atonement, into resurrection. It's a foolish choice to stay in rebellion and under wrath when life is available. Let me pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women, an opportunity to be together today. I pray already for the many who raised their hands and said, "I'm in that squishy middle," the several who raised their hand and said, "Man, I'm just not a Christian. I've been hanging out. I've been talking with people. People have been sharing Christ with me, but I'm not quite there yet."

I just pray, Spirit of God, that you would break through, that you would illuminate, that you would give eyes to see. I pray for courage right now. It'll take supernatural courage for people to stand up and be seen as one in need. We don't like to be perceived as one in need. So we ask, Spirit of God, give strength and courage. Be gracious and kind to us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.