

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been doing a series that I have just called Games People Play. So let me catch you up real quickly, so I can read what I believe to be a very interesting and weird text in the middle of this section. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, there is a group of men and women that follow Him who want to have an appearance of godliness and want to have a religious, moral appearance, but at the end of the day they have no intention of submitting to Christ as Lord at all. What they do instead of submitting to Christ as Lord is they begin to play games. Whether those games semantic games or philosophical games, what they do is try to distract the God of the universe so as to not do that thing that they don't want to do. What I've contended with you over the last month is that we're really not that different than these men and women. Through the teaching of the Word, through the proclamation of the Word, the Holy Spirit will press on our hearts to be obedient to what God has commanded. And often in those moments, obedience feels painful and it feels like we might lose a part of our personhood if we are obedient to what God wants us to do. At the end of the day, we just don't want to do it. So in that moment, we either submit to how God's revealed Himself or we begin to play games with God.

Here are how those games look. Game number one is redefining His authority. So when the Holy Spirit presses on our heart to do something we don't want to do, we will away from biblical, historical, orthodox Jesus and we create our own Jesus out here. And he is a Jesus that doesn't ask us to do things that are painful for us. He's a Jesus that doesn't challenge us towards holiness. He's a Jesus that's just grateful to have us on his team. He is an imaginary Jesus that, at the end of the day, apparently does not love you in any way. Because if there's an infinite God that sees all things behind you and all things in front of you and is not in any way attempting to line you up with how things are, then he is a wicked God, indifferent to you and ultimately hates you. So your imaginary Jesus, the one you created in your mind outside of Scripture, the one you created is far less loving, far less compassionate and far less merciful than the God of the Bible who asks you to line up with how He designed the universe to be. That's game number one. Here's how it comes out of people's mouths, "There's no way God would ask me to do that. If I did that, I wouldn't be happy, and God would never ask me to do anything that would make me unhappy." I always like to respond with, "Try that philosophy with children." If you give children that much leeway, they will burn down a hemisphere. And that's just the good ones. With the bad ones, it gets a lot worse than that. So this idea of God that's a very popular idea for people who are spiritual, it's a god that's outside of the Bible, it's a god that people get to define, it's a god of the imagination, in the end turns out to be far less gracious, far less loving and far less merciful than the God of the Bible. It's the god of the imagination. It's by far the most popular game that people play when they don't want to be obedient to how God has revealed Himself.

Game number two is a complex game. In order to not submit your heart to Him, game number two is to pick a subject that God is passionate about and become passionate about that subject, all the while not submitting to Him. This is the example I gave you. If you've ever been part of a church where the pastor, elder, deacon had a fall of some sort, usually by some sort of immoral behavior, what has happened is they had a cause, like the gospel which is good and right, but they did not submit their heart to the Lord. So in the end, they're working for the Lord as if He needed help and then in the end didn't submit their own hearts to Him. The example I gave was the religious right. If you want to know what happened to the religious right and what made them such clowns is they were pushing a moral agenda and at the same time sleeping with their secretaries and every once in a while a random guy in an airport bathroom. Do you see what's happened there? They might have a cause that's worthy, but without a heart that's been transformed by the Holy Spirit of God, without a humble obedience as an individual, the cause will eventually be tainted. This happens all the time.

God says, "Take one step to the left." And we go, "That might be embarrassing. How about I run right at 100mph?" It's a very popular game in the Bible Belt. God will ask for a simple step of obedience, we don't want to ask for it, so instead of doing that, we teach Sunday school, lead a home group and go on a mission trip. This is a sport in the Bible Belt. You train for this. This is one of the ways we play games with God.

There's a couple of other games that people play that are very popular. They'll take a pet issue and try to make God look out of touch. So whether that be marriage, the role of men and women as Scripture defines them, or homosexuality, they take that one issue and they try to make God look dated and old like He's out of touch. They're like, "It's 2009. We get it, and the God of the Bible just doesn't get it. We're further along." Okay, let's chat. For at least 2000 years, governments, kings, leaders of corporations and other leaders have written documents, constitutions and laws against injustice. In the world today, do governments still kill their people? Do they slaughter them wholesale by the thousands? Absolutely they do. It's happening today. Did you know that this week in Nigeria, three Christian pastors had their heads cut off? That happened. It happened this week. Do you know why they dragged them out in front of their families and cut their heads off? Because they taught the Bible. How crazy is that? It happened this week.

Do corporations still oppress the poor so that the billionaires can get even more money? Now let me throw this out. I'm very much a patriot, but does our own government turn a blind eye to the oppression of the poor and needy around the world so that they might stay powerful and rich? And I know some of you are saying, "Chandler, you're in the Bible Belt, boy. You had better be careful." I'm not a big conspiracy theory guy. In order for there to be conspiracies, hundreds of people have to keep a secret for a long period of time. There is nothing in my interaction with humanity that leads me to believe that's even possible. So I'm not a huge conspiracy theory guy, but you don't have to be brilliant to know that we're involved in some shady stuff at the oppression of those who can't defend themselves.

So many times when you turn on the news, they paint some Christian pastor as some backwoods idiot who's out of touch with how the world really is and say that we have now arrived at the pinnacle of human understanding as to make God look like He's wearing Reebok high-tops and some corduroy Op shorts and He's just this outdated, outmoded. That's how He gets painted all the time, as if in 2009 we've somehow arrived at the pinnacle of human understanding, despite the fact that 90% of the world wouldn't land anywhere near where our enlightened men and women land. And anyone who teaches contrary to them are somehow old school, backwoods fundamentalists. I continue to try to tell you. This is a far more arrogant position than one that says, "There is a Creator God who created the world a certain way and life works best when we submit ourselves to how He designed the universe to work. Life works best when you use a hammer to drive a nail in instead of a wrench." So we take our little pet thing, whatever it is, and we go, "Ah, He doesn't get it. He doesn't understand." These are some of the games we play.

Now, I want to wrap up this idea by showing you a very interesting text. It's interesting because if you just look at it out of context, it looks like one thing, but if you back out, it looks like something else. Let me show you what I mean. Let's look at Luke 21, starting in verse 1, "Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.'" Now, what do you think we're going to teach on for the next half hour? Giving? Should I remind you that the Flower Mound expansion is almost done? Should I put up the thermometer? I'll go get one. I'll get out the red marker, and put it on the stage to show you where we are. Should we do an offering right now? Or should we say that the measure of a gift is not in what is given but what is left over after you give? We could do that. Or we could say, "It's not about money but giving 100%. You need to give all that you are, all that you have." I could get Bleecker to get back up here and sing Eye of the Tiger. We could do that. We could be real motivated and go, "Give all that you have. Work as hard as you can." We could go that route with it.

And in my work over the last month, almost every commentary I read took it one of those directions. I know this will sound arrogant, but they're wrong. This text is not about giving at all. This text is not about money. This text is not about any of those things. And in order to see what's happening here, you've got to pull back and read it in its context. You have to read what has taken place before it and what takes place after it. So we're going to do that and talk about what this text says and what it means for those of us who play games with God.

Let's go back to verse 45 of Luke 20. Before we read this, bear in mind that it's Wednesday afternoon of Passion Week. Which means we're less than 24 hours from Jesus' arrest, we're less than 48 hours from His crucifixion. In the gospel of Luke, there will not be any more invitations to follow or any more offers of mercy. He's headed to the cross. Look at what He says. "And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.""

Now look down at verse 5 of Luke 21. "And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." If you have little headings down in your Bible, it says, "Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple." The next one, "Jesus foretells wars and persecution." The next one, "Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem." Needless to say, we're not in a chipper section of the book. So Jesus says, "Beware of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Beware of this religious system. Beware of those who would devour a widow's house and then make a long prayer." And then that's followed by, "Do you see this ornate, beautiful temple? I'm going to burn it to the ground. And this city, I'm going to burn it to the ground. And this nation, I'm going to judge." And in the middle, you've got this story of the little old lady giving her two cents. This can't be about giving. Do you think Jesus is going, "I'm going to burn this place down...but get your tithe in real quick. Make sure you get your tithe in before I blow this thing to pieces."

By the way, just so you know that Jesus isn't a liar, in 70 A.D., roughly 40 years after this is said, Rome lays siege to Jerusalem and destroys it. The force Rome used was so powerful that you can see markings on the outer wall to this day from where Rome laid siege to that city. This text about the little old lady, it's not about giving at all. Let's do it this way. In the gospel of Luke, every time Jesus wants to point out something that people should do, He'll say, "Go and do like wise" or "The kingdom of God is like this." Do you see any of that there? Was there any commendation at all towards this lady or towards the rich? He doesn't say the rich are doing bad, and He doesn't say the old lady is doing good. As He's saying, "Beware of the Scribes and Pharisees who devour widows' houses," He looks up and sees wealthy people putting in money. And all of a sudden He sees this old lady put in her last two bits. In fact, He makes it a point to say it was "all that she had to live on."

I think I can bring it home like this. A couple of years ago, I was up late with Lauren. We had just put Audrey down for bed. When you have your first baby, you're just like, "Oh God, is it always going to be like this?" So Lauren and I had a few minutes to actually look at each other. So we put Audrey down, we're sitting there talking and then we flipped on the TV and there was this televangelist. Now that stuff is not good for my soul. My wife said, "Baby, don't." But for me, it's like a plane crash. I just have to watch it. I don't know why, I just can't change the channel. I know I'd be a better man, I know I'd sleep better, I know that anger in me would not arise, but I kept it there. And here's what he did. He looked straight into the camera and said, "Some of you little old ladies holding on to that retirement check, not sure how you're going to make ends meet, the Lord has said if you sow into what He is doing, He'll provide above and beyond what you give. In fact, here's a testimony right here. 'I didn't know how I was going to make my rent. I trusted the Lord...'" Do you know what I felt? Rage. That's what I felt. In fact, I thought I heard the Holy Spirit say, "Drive on out to Dallas and punch that guy in the throat." I felt rage, and I felt that man had fear of God. And I thought, "There will be a day where, like the

Scriptures say, there will be a time when that man wants mountains to fall on top of him, and there will be no mountains to cover." I felt anger. Because any religion built on the backs of the poor is not a religion.

I think that's what's happening in this text. Jesus saying, "Beware of the Scribes, beware of the Pharisees, beware of these game-playing clowns," looks up and sees an old widow give all that she has to a religious system that she thinks is going to save her. And then He overhears people talking about how beautiful the temple is, and He says, "I'm going to burn this place to the ground."

So what's the lesson for us? Because I'm guessing that if you look back on last week, you didn't build religious systems that oppress the poor. Maybe you did, but I'm guessing that you didn't. Let me just tell you what this has to do with playing games with God. It's a very unpopular lesson, but it's one you need to hear and it's one you honestly have to wrestle with. When you play games with God, there is always collateral damage. When you play games with God, there will always be those around you hurt and wounded by it.

Let me unpack that a little bit. My sin and my refusal to submit to God has a direct effect not only on my wife but all three of my children. I do not get to sin in isolation. I wish I did, but I don't get to. There is collateral damage when the Lord reveals to me, "This is where we're going," and I say, "That's not where I'm going." Men, the Bible has said that you will set the spiritual climate of your home. So where you are indifferent to God or He is a tertiary issue to you, a secondary issue to you, He's something you do on Sunday, you build out a climate that believes, breathes and operates like that, specifically for your kids. Where you have said, "I'm not following You there," you put an unreal amount of pressure on your wife to fill a gap that you are supposed to fill. And there's consequences to that. Here's just a real interesting fact about our culture. We're forcing our 5-11 year olds into adulthood and then allowing our 18-27 year olds to be babies. So back here it's, "Play sports...get involved...learn a language...go go go go...do do do do...go accomplish it...get it done because you're a reflection of me..." There are some of you who have made your kids' sports your god, not by your mouth but by your action. They don't go to church camp, family camp or Disciple Now, they don't connect with Christian young people. What they do is play sports, and they train, they lift, they get on the creatine and then they go off to college and they don't want anything to do with church or Christ. And you're trying to lie to yourself and say, "I didn't raise them that way." You did to. You trained them that a stupid ball was more important than serving, knowing, walking and loving the God of the universe. You taught them that. That's collateral damage to your sin. I'm not saying don't let them play sports. Let's play, let's win...but at what cost? Let's face it, your kid isn't going to be a professional athlete. So your glory is that your fourth grader made an all-star team? Do you not think that makes you pathetic? You can giggle, but some of you are shelling out a lot of cash for this right now. You don't think that, in the grand scope of eternity, makes you a little pathetic? This is you creating climate, this is you creating culture, this is you teaching your family, leading your family. When you don't open up the Word in your home, when you don't pray with your children, if you think it's your wife's job to raise your children, there is collateral damage, both to your wife and to your children.

Single ladies, I know you're not going to believe me here. I know this is climbing Everest naked...impossible. But let me just say it for my own piece of mind. It is better to be single at 40 than to love God and marry a man who has no intention of leading. You will heap upon yourself sorrow upon sorrow upon sorrow. And I know that you think the loneliness that you feel now is bad, but I promise you there is worse loneliness.

Ladies, if God reveals to you that you have intimacy issues, that you have bitterness issues, that you have forgiveness issues, that if you have self-hatred, if He reveals that to you and you just sit in that, that puts an unbelievable burden on your husband. Because Christ has commanded him to love you like Christ loves the church. And any smart man would go, "Um, didn't the church crucify Him?" So the man gets to come to the Lord and go, "She's so unresponsive no matter what I do." And Jesus is going, "Yeah, My church is the same way. Here's how We're going to respond. We're going to

continue to patiently love her, be gracious to her and woo her.” “Really? Because I was thinking about pouting or getting angry. Do I get to do either one of those?” “Well you can, but it doesn’t make anything better. So here would be My recommendation as the God of the universe. Love her, woo her, be patient, romance and maybe even rescue her.” So listen, marriage is a blast. It should be. It’s work, but it is fun. But when God reveals that those kind of heart things are going on and you decide that you’re going to sit in them, what you do to your husband is doom marriage to be for him a long struggle of obedience unto heaven. Which means he just walks one step at a time and is looking forward unto death. How does that benefit anyone? Because he can’t bail; he can’t leave, not biblically. Biblically, he’s covenanted in. So his is collateral damage.

Nobody’s kids, right out of the gate, mirror the positive things about them back to them. They mirror negative immediately. You get to see the positive stuff later, but nobody wakes up at 5:00AM and the kid has cleaned the house and is sitting there reading his Bible journaling, “I need to surrender more of my life to the Lord.” Nobody wakes up to that kid. Instead, you wake up to the play room on fire. “Who caught the playroom on fire?” “I don’t know.” Kids reflect back to you what you are. Isn’t that horrible? It’s like a gift from the Lord, “Here’s a mirror for 18 years.” Do you not think that they will reap some of the consequences of our disobedience?

Okay, so we’ve got to get out of the abstract and get on the ground. Nobody’s clean on this, no one. All have fallen short. Everyone in this room has done this. Everyone in this room has collateral damage around them. So what do we do, man? Because some of this can be crushing, especially as you get older and you actually get to see the results of your disobedience in your family and those around you. We always have to come back to the cross, guys. We’ve got nowhere else to go. We have to come back to the fact that God, in His infinite mercy, poured out His wrath on Jesus Christ on the cross. So that those who would confess, repent and submit their lives to Him might be saved from the consequences of sin, ultimately and even buffered from some in the here and now.

So what does that look like? I think it’s two-fold. Both are church words. The first is confession. There needs to be a confession out of our mouths to God that we’re game players. There needs to be a confession out of our mouths that we come to church on the weekend but the rest of the week we live however we want to live it, that we’re in the same scene everyone else is in. The only difference is we come to church on Sunday and we call ourselves Christians, despite the fact that I strongly doubt that you are. I know you might not come back after that, but I’m loving you enough to say it to you. You have no love for the Lord, no pursuit of Him, no desire to serve Him. You come to church on the weekend so you’re a Christian? Read your Bible, you’re not. And so there needs to be a confession, “I’m playing games, and I don’t want to play games anymore.”

There also needs to be a confession on the ground to others. No matter how hard I’ve tried as a husband, I have failed my wife on multiple occasions. Do you know what happens in that moment when I realize that? Let me be honest. I usually think of a reason why it might be her fault. I almost always go, “She can be blamed for this somehow.” This is going to sound crazy. I have often had to sit down across from my wife and say, “I have failed you because I have failed to be obedient to what God has commanded of me.” And it doesn’t matter whether she says, “No, I think you’ve done a great job” or “I think you’re being too hard on yourself” or “That’s right.” It doesn’t matter what she says in that moment I’m confessing to her. I can’t tell you how often I have to pull my kids together and just go, “I’ve done you a disservice. I need you to forgive me.” Now, maybe they will forgive me or maybe my kids will use my shortcomings as an excuse to run away from the Lord. At the end of the day, that will be their sin, not mine. I’ll apologize sincerely and ask for forgiveness for those I have harmed because of my disobedience and pray that the Lord would extend me grace in their lives.

We confess, and then we repent. What does repent mean? We have a phrase here that we use all the time. In fact, if you ever come to one of our baptism services, you'll hear it in the water. The phrase goes like this, "It's okay to not be okay." Isn't that good news? That's great news. It's okay to not be okay. But there's a second part, "...but it's not okay to stay there." Repentance is just making war against your sin. Here's why I think most of us don't make war against what's sinful in us. Most of us believe that we're victims of someone else. "So I really don't have to slay sin in my life, I don't have to battle against evil in my life because the reality is I'm only this because my dad was what he was, and then his dad was even more wicked than him, and his dad was even more wicked than him. And so I'm the way I am because somebody else messed me up." Maybe there are parts of your life where you are a victim, but you will respond to being a victim in ways that are righteous and lead to your healing or in ways that will leave you bitter, angry and a real horrible person. Repentance is making war against the beast of sin inside you.

And we've done everything we can here to create pathways for you to do that. We have Recovery at the Village. And don't think I don't know that some of you have been coming here for five years with the Holy Spirit pounding you that you have an issue and need to get into Recovery but you've been going, "Oh, I need to do that, but I'm just so busy." What could be more important than your own spiritual health? We've got biblical counselors that are willing to walk with you, to show you the Scriptures, to reveal to you directions, to give you godly counsel. We have people who are willing to sit down you and do nothing but pray with you for an hour over a singular issue. But you'll have to make the war. I don't understand why we don't. And all I went over is the collateral damage. I didn't even get to Jesus saying, "I'm going to burn this thing to the ground."

I know I've been a little strong this morning. My hope and prayer all week has been that in this moment, God would give you eyes to see where you have decided that you're smarter than He is, where you have decided your way is better than His, where you have played games, where you have refused to obey, where you have created collateral damage. My prayer is that we might, in this moment, feel the weight of who we are, what we've done and where we are. I pray that in this moment, you might truly understand the grace and mercy of Christ extended to you. I pray that you understand that God, right now, in this moment, doesn't love you after you confess and repent, that He doesn't love some future version of you. Understand that He loves you right now, right as you are, with the collateral damage that you've caused laying all around you, and He extends mercy, grace and hope. And so it might be a good idea for you to finally confess out loud with your mouth to Him that you don't really follow Him and don't really know Him. It might be a great idea on the way home to look at your wife, your husband, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your father, your mother or your children and confess, "I have failed to be obedient to the Lord and need to ask for your forgiveness." For a month now we've said this. There are certain times, places and things you play games with, and there are certain times, places and persons you do not play games with. Although we see in the New Testament that the infinite God of the universe laughs quite a bit, gives the boys closest to Him nicknames, sits around the fire, flips over tables, this infinite God of the universe does not play games with the souls of men.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I thank You particularly for my brothers and for the men in this room. It's such a rare thing to meet godly men. It's easy to find neat Christian guys and churchgoing guys. But it's a rare thing to find ferociously godly men who seek You, follow You and discipline their lives to know You and honor others. I pray that You would increase their number in our midst, that You would grow us into those men and that You would chisel off of us what is selfish, self-seeking and self-exalting. I pray for my sisters that You would encourage, strengthen and push them to holiness. Where they have harbored hurt, where they have harbored anger, unforgiveness, bitterness and fear, I pray, Holy Spirit, that You would loosen their hearts and that they would seek help and seek healing and their own sanctification. Father we're prone to wander and prone to play games. Thank You for Your mercy and grace. Help us. We need You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."