

Marked (Part 10) – The Divine Sovereignty of God

Matt Chandler – October 22, 2017

If you have your Bibles, why don't you grab those? We're going to be in Romans, chapter 8. Last weekend, our fall series *Marked* took a turn away from our kind of statement that defines what we're up to and who we are and then moved to what we're calling our distinctives. Let me explain *distinctives* really quickly, and then we're going to dive into the distinctive we're going to cover this week.

If you're thinking about Christian theology, there are kind of two buckets in which you should be thinking. One would be kind of a closed bucket or a closed hand, which is kind of orthodox Christian belief, which means if you don't believe these things, you're not a Christian. Then there's another bucket or another hand that would be called the open hand of theology, and this is where Christians will differ on what we believe about what the Word of God teaches in a particular subject.

What we've done now is we have made a turn, and we are covering The Village's distinctives. What we want to do with distinctives is we want to inform you where we land, and then we want to show charity to others. Last week, that started with baptism and the Lord's Supper. What Trevor said so effectively last week is this is what we believe the Word of God says about baptism. We believe in believers' baptism. We think that's what the Bible teaches, and we're going to surrender to the Bible's teaching on this.

That's not what Presbyterians believe, and that's not what Methodists believe. That's not what Anglicans believe. We're not saying they're not Christians, right? We're not saying they're not our brothers and sisters. In fact, we would healthily affirm they *are* our brothers and sisters. We land differently on this issue. We're going to show each other charity even as we perceive one another to be wrong. We do!

I don't know why you're giggling. We do! I think they're wrong. They think I'm wrong. I love them and praise God for them. We just disagree on this distinctive. One of the things you and I must learn and grow in in this kind of hyper-angry day is to show charity to our brothers and sisters. People who disagree with us on secondary matters are not heretics. Look at me. People who disagree with us on secondary issues are *not* heretics!

Last week we started with baptism and Communion. We're going to talk about *divine sovereignty* today, which I'll call the electing love of God. Next weekend is the *inerrancy* of Scripture, that the Word of God is inerrant. It is sufficient. We just believe that here. From there, we'll talk about *complementarianism* or the role of man and woman in the flourishing of the church, the home, and the world. Then we'll end our kind of distinctives on talking about the weird gifts of the Holy Spirit, the *sign gifts*.

The reason I said it that way is every gift we have is from the Holy Spirit. If you have the gift of administration, the Holy Spirit gave you that. If you have the gift of hospitality, the Holy Spirit gave you that. What I want to address in that last sermon is the strange ones, the weird ones, the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit. That's our series.

Today let me start by talking about the electing love of God. Now here's what I know. I know this subject makes people anxious, but I'll tell you this. It makes your pastor like nearly explode with joy. You just have to know I'm not anxious.

Now on February 6, 2003, our alarm went off in our bedroom earlier than normal. We had pre-packed a bag, and we grabbed that bag. Lauren and I got in the car, and we drove to a hospital about 25 minutes from here. I'd been pastor here I think for three months at this point (maybe four months). We checked in, and we had scheduled the birth of our firstborn.

Now eye contact really quickly. If you want to have your baby in a bathtub in your living room, I'm cool with that. You should just do that. You should just go ahead, learn the breathing techniques, and just go for it. I'm for you. Lauren has a built-out theology of epidurals. She would point to the fact that pain in childbirth is a result of the fall. In the coming of Jesus Christ, he has redeemed, not just in salvation but via gifts of common grace.

All right. So you can see what's happening right now. Right? Even Lauren just started worshiping. Her hand came up. I maybe heard a tongue, but that's several weeks from now. We'll talk about that

then. Now in this space, we sign up. We get there. Then we're all in. Man, there are drugs being pumped into her system. Audrey is 14 years old. She seems to be doing fine. It didn't seem to cause any long-term damage or anything like that. Hours and hours and hours later, Audrey was born.

The first time you're in that room... I know not all of us have been. Well, all of us *have* been in that room. Not all of us have been in that room as *adults*. The first thing that kind of sticks out to you when you haven't been in that room is how rough the nurse is with your baby. I mean, the baby is like 10 seconds old, and they're like scrubbing it and suctioning its face out. I felt this kind of compulsion to step in and handle some things, but then I was like, "Uh, do you want to get arrested on your first child's birthday? No. Back off."

Then they wrapped up Audrey, and they put her in my arms. I nearly exploded and/or crumbled. I had never felt love like that. If you're like, "Well, what about your wife?" no, no, no. I am crazy about my bride. I love my wife. She is a gift of God's grace, but the way you love your child is different. It's just different.

I held that little girl, and then Bleecker came and met us at the hospital. We drove her home. He was flying. Back then, we were going like 35 mph on the freeway going, "Slow down!" Then we get her home, and I still can't believe they let us leave the hospital with her. Did anybody else feel that? They were like, "Okay, you can go home." You're like, "Wait. What? No! We ain't goin' home. What? No! No, no, no, no. No, no, no. Are you coming? Because if you're not coming, we're not leaving." You get the child home.

Then several years later on November 4, I walked in our door at like nine o'clock at night after an epically long day. I had just finished a wedding rehearsal and rehearsal dinner. I walked in the room to Lauren saying, "It's time. We need to go." Now this one certainly wasn't scheduled for ten o'clock at night. We headed to the hospital. If you're a second-born, the answer is *yes*, so I don't want to cause any stress or trigger anything in you. But there is a question when you're having your second whether or not you have the same capacity to love the second like you did the first.

I mean, that first... I mean, you're just so crazy, "Oh my gosh! This is incredible!" The question is just there. "Do I have the capacity to love this second baby like I loved the first?" There's this real wrestle about that. Then Reid was born. Then now I knew, "That nurse is cool. I don't need to say anything. We're good."

They wrapped up Reid, and they handed me Reid. When they handed me Reid, I knew. I knew not only could I but there was more in me. Then, man, gosh! When they put him in the little cart and they let me kind of roll him down to the nursery, I nearly broke, like just ugly sobbed, "Oh my gosh! I have a son!"

Then we had two miscarriages, and then got pregnant again with Norah. Norah was a lot of... We were nervous. We were praying. In every little thing, we were constantly like, "Is she moving? Well, let's try to make her move. Okay. Everything is good in there." Then there's the question again. "Do I have more in me to give?" I know some of you have like seven kids. You're like, "Oh, bro. Shut up! Oh, three! Okay, you're so strong."

We head to the hospital. Then Norah is born. Then they clean up Norah, and they wrap Norah up. They hand her to me again. Then there it is. I mean, it just expanded. I just got to be a teary mess. I was like, "Oh my gosh!" Here's what I've learned now. After 14 years of being a parent (I know some of you will just roll your eyes at that), here's what I've learned.

I've learned parenting is a process, and in every season... That's what parenting is like. You go in season and out of season. In every season, there are things about my children that I love and I get excited about. There are things about my children that make me anxious or maybe make me angry. No amen on that? Okay. Okay. Let's just be real here today. You can just put that fake, "I'm a perfect parent" nonsense somewhere else, because I see you out there. You're losing your mind in Target. I saw it.

Now in that space, here's what never changed. Something I noticed a couple of years ago is, regardless of the season, I love my kids. Here's what I've picked up on. When they choose poorly, my love seems to be incited almost more than it is when they're doing everything I hoped they would do. Have you noticed that? I can feel my love get incited (it can flame up) far more often when I see them choosing what will ultimately harm them, destroy them, or break them. My love is just ever-present, regardless of the season.

Man, all week long, I've just had this weight on my heart for us. What would it be like to believe God loves us like this? What would it be like? I mean, what would it honestly be like? What Jesus says about my love for Audrey, Reid, and Norah... Here's what Jesus says. If you who are an evil father know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more does your heavenly Father know how to give you what is good?

So Jesus would look at my affection for my children, my love, my hope for my children, and he is like, "Bro, it's thin! It's thin! It lacks breadth, depth, and width." He says that because of his love for his children. On the electing love of God, there are four points. Here is the first one. *God sees us as children.* Let's look at this. Romans 8:14 through 17. **"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."** Ladies, look at me. Look at me, ladies. We have to be the bride of Christ. You get to be the sons of God. Let's just all deal with it, all right? Let's just all deal with it.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

So look at me. You're not a project. You're not a pawn. You're not something God is just dealing with. You're not a necessary evil. You are sons of God. In fact, I love in 1 John 3:1 (one of my favorite passages in the Bible), it says, **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us..."** You want to see what kind of love the Father has given to us? **"...that we should be called children of God."** Heirs of God. Coheirs with Christ. He would lavish upon us in eternity and throughout eternity the incomprehensible riches of his grace.

You're not a project. You're not a pawn. You're a child of God. The affection we can have for our children, God would look at that and say, "If you who are evil know how to do good, how much more...?" Let's talk about in this electing love that "how much more." The other three points are around this kind of how much more our heavenly Father has for us than our earthly fathers even had the capacity to have for us, even if you had a great one. I know a lot of us didn't have great ones.

Here would be the first one. One of the reasons Jesus can look at us and say, "If you evil fathers know how to do good, how much more will your heavenly Father?" is the fact that *God loved us before we were born.* God loved us before we were born. Let me read this to you. Ephesians 1:3 through 8. I'll put it on the screen. Stay there in Romans 8. We're going to read a verse there here in a second.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 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..." Don't let that word scare you. It just means to determine beforehand.

"In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, 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..."

Now this is where I get filled with joy. In an environment in a day and age in which achievement and performance are the rule in order for me to feel loved and accepted, the Bible says, "No, no, no. I loved you before you were able to perform. My love is not predicated upon or built on your behavior, your ability to conform but on my grace, my power, my purpose, my will." Now look. Gosh! That should make you just go, "Oh, God! Thank God! Thank God!"

Then look at Romans 8, and then we're going to talk about you before you were born here in a second. Let's look at Romans 8. Here's what interesting, and I picked up on this about Romans 8. Almost every Christian I know loves Romans 8:28. I mean, they love it! It might be on a coffee cup. It might be on some kind of neat kind of thing hanging on their wall. It might be their life verse.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." We love that verse, and then we love, love, love verse 31.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" We love those two verses, and yet what holds those two verses together are verses 29 and 30. What makes them true is actually verses 29 and 30.

You can't love verse 28, love verse 31, and ignore verses 29 and 30. Verses 29 and 30 pull them together and help us be confident in their truths. Here we go. Let's look at it. Verse 29: **"For those whom he foreknew..."** That's to know beforehand, although I would argue if I had more time, to *love* beforehand (those he *loved* beforehand).

"...he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." Now, okay, let's chat. Let's talk about you before you were. Before you were around in your physical human

form, when the foundation of the earth was being laid, what skill set did you have that made God pick you for his team?

As God is looking out at the expanse of eternity, what are you bringing to the table? You're not, because you're not there. I'm telling you the reason that for me this is the most freeing, beautiful thing imaginable is I am secure in the love of the Father because it existed before I failed him. It was out of that love that he saved me when I was at my worst.

I mean, this is good news. It's not bad news. For all of the conflict this doctrine causes, I think it's most often mischaracterized. A straw man is built and caught on fire. This is not about exclusivity. This is about our safety in the love of God. You feel this. Every time you fail, every time you stumble, you feel, "I need to run from God." You feel it, and the Bible is going, "No, no, no. You're secure in his love because his love rested on you before the foundation of the earth was laid."

This causes worship. This causes us to run *to* him, not *from* him. Any Calvinist who gets crusty and mean is in theological puberty and should be locked up for a few years until they learn nuance and grace. You find those morons trying to convert everyone to the five points. You just think to yourself, "Theological puberty. Voice is cracking. Filled with theological hormones." You just don't want to let them out of the house for a while. "Just shut up until you learn some nuance."

I'm telling you, this happens all the time. Look at me. Please, for the rest of your life, don't let theological morons rob you of theological truth. Don't hate a doctrine just because you come across a moron preaching that gospel or preaching that doctrine. Don't do that to yourselves. Mine for truth. Rest in the beauty of what God is saying here. Look at me. Look at me! You are loved. That's crazy!

Before and in full view of all of your failures, God put his love on you. Do you know that thing in your past that chews away at your gut and if you could get in a time machine, go back, and change it, you would? That thing. Do you know who knew that when the foundation of the earth was laid? God knew it. Do you know who still lavished his love and grace on you despite it? God did. Gosh! What fuels the praises of God's people like this thing? God's love for you present before you were born. Gosh! I love it!

Now that's not the only thing. I get hype about that. I get even more hype about this. *The day you became a Christian pleased the heart of God.* This is Galatians 1:15 through 17. All the pieces we just

covered are actually in this text also. **"But when he who had set me apart before I was..."** What? **"...born..."** All right. So Saul of Tarsus was set apart before he was born. For what?

"...and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles..." Then he goes on and talks about how he was discipled. Now here's what I want to point out in this text. I want to point out really the insanity and depth of God's love. If you don't know the background of the apostle Paul, let me fill you in quickly.

Saul of Tarsus was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee of Pharisees, circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin. When it came to the law, he was faultless, spotless. He obeyed the law in fullness (at least as it goes for people's perspective of him). Saul of Tarsus hated Jesus Christ, and he hated the church. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, was stoned, pelted with rocks until he died. The Bible says the cloaks of those men who stoned him were laid at the feet of Saul, and Saul was in hearty approval of his execution.

The Bible goes on to say Saul began to ravage (that's from the text) the church of Jesus Christ. He would publicly humiliate them. He would imprison them. He would murder them. He would abuse them. He was a blasphemer and a violent man. This was Saul of Tarsus longing to eradicate this cult that stood in opposition to the God as he understood him.

The Bible tells us Saul of Tarsus went to the officials of the day and said, "Hey, I heard they just planted a church in Damascus. I would like papers to go to Damascus, and anyone I find belonging to the Way, to drag them back in chains to Jerusalem." Why? To publicly shame them. "Let's strip them naked. Let's chain them. Let's parade them through the streets of Jerusalem so anyone even thinking about this Jesus would see that and go, 'No, no, no. I'm not doing that.'"

Let's just use our sanctified imagination here. Saul of Tarsus gets his horse out. In your imagination, that horse can look like whatever you want it to look like. That's not really the point. Then he saddles it up. What are you going to need? I mean, you're going to need some chains. I mean, if you're going to chain a bunch of people and drag them back to Jerusalem, you're going to have to pack some chains.

He gets those chains, and he puts them on the horse. Then you need some weapon of intimidation. You need some sort of weapon in order to kick open a door and drag people into the street. So

maybe it's a club. Maybe it's a sword. Maybe it's a spear. There's some sort of intimidating weapon there. He gets that, and he puts it in the saddle.

Then he gets on the horse, and he starts to head to Damascus with the intent of kicking open doors, dragging people into the streets, stripping them naked, beating them, chaining them, and dragging them behind horses to Jerusalem or parade them in shame through the streets of Jerusalem. They make camp night one, and then he saddles up the horse. "Where is the club?" I'm just going to say *club*. He puts the club in. He puts the chains back on, fastens them, gets a drink, eats some breakfast, and hops on his horse to head on in to Damascus to kick open doors.

What the Bible says is on that morning when Saul of Tarsus got up, he put that saddle on his horse, and he was looking for where he put his club, the God of the Bible was like, "All right. Come on. Hop on that horse, bro. Okay. I'm going to meet you in about three miles. Come on toward Damascus."

There was this pleasure in the heart of God to reveal Jesus to Saul of Tarsus. Now look right at me for a second. I'm not naïve, man. I've been in pastoral ministry for 20 years. What this is about right now is you becoming convinced you have not out-sinned the grace of God. How does God respond to a man like Saul of Tarsus? Utter destruction? Let me tell you this. He has certainly earned it. I'll tell you what my flesh wants to do. My flesh would want to see kind of prophet of Baal stuff, right? Like fire fall down from heaven and the slaughter of those who oppose God Almighty.

Do you know what God responds with? This is crazy. Love! He responded to Saul of Tarsus with love. This thing where Jesus says, "Love your enemies," he is embodying it in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the apostle Paul. It pleased the heart of God! Listen. I think this is some of you here today. Some of you, the weekend has been long, and you have been wrangling things. Maybe you're going to go to church; maybe you're not. Your weirdo neighbor keeps asking you. Or you've been coming here and there, and maybe you're going to come, and maybe you're not.

You jammed everybody into the car, and you screamed, "Why can't you keep your shoes where they go?" You're driving. This whole time, God is just like, "Come on. 9:50 is coming. I can't wait for 9:50. At 9:50, I'm going to open this person's heart to believe and trust in the name of Jesus." Here's what I want to call you to. Listen. If you're in this room and you're not a Christian, this is what you're being invited into: this love that predates your existence!

That longing to be loved that forces so many of us to project an image of being all together so we might receive some hollow, thin, weak version of this kind of love? You don't need to carry that. This is such great news! You get to just rest in the eternal love of God for you in Jesus Christ. I'm inviting you. If you're like, "Well, what if I'm not one of those?" listen! You're here. You're hearing the gospel. I think there's a lot of objective evidence now that you're being invited in.

That's a straw man that I think those who don't like this doctrine like to lie. "Well, what about the people...?" No, no. You're here. You're hearing. I'm inviting you per the commands of God in the Bible to come into this love. Come into this love! It transcends human love and makes all human love thin. I'm not dogging human love. It's a beautiful, powerful force. I'm just saying the Bible says God's love's width, breadth, and height will just blow your mind. If you who are evil know how to be good, how much more then your Father in heaven?

Listen. Unbeliever... No, no, no. God has sent Christ into the world to save you from condemnation, not to condemn you. Here I am heralding the electing love of God. Come in to this love. Step into this love. Repent of your sins. Join the household of faith, and let's pursue him together. The invitation goes out to all men and women. I'm extending it. Come into the love of the Father. It's here. It's right here! Just come in. Just come in!

Then, as though this is not extravagant enough, *God loves you in the crossroads of your life when you choose disobedience over obedience*. Now look right at me because it's very important you hear what I'm saying. God hates sin, and he disciplines disobedience. Don't you hear me saying, "Sin doesn't matter. Do whatever you want." That's *not* what I'm saying. I'm saying God hates sin, and when you choose disobedience instead of obedience, God will discipline that. The Bible is clear on that.

Hebrews, chapter 12. He disciplines all those who are his, and he scourges his sons. Right? We are disciplined. Why? What's the motivation of that discipline? Love is! Why do you discipline your kids? Because you love them. Remember earlier when I'm saying now I can feel my love provoked when my children choose what is wrong, choose what will harm them, choose what ultimately robs them from deep, beautiful life? It incites my love, and it can make me angry, but it's love that's driving that. It's not hate. I'm not taking those things personally.

I'm just so crazy about them. I'm 43, so I can see some things they can't see. I've been following the Lord for a while now. I can see the lies that are being laid before them on a daily basis, and I just want to plead with them, "Don't! If you go down that path, there's death down that path. Maybe not

this year, maybe not five years from now, maybe not 10 years from now, but when this gets full-grown, it will kill you. Choose life."

I want to show you that. Anytime I feel discouraged in my own ability to be as obedient as I want to be in following Jesus Christ, I just simply turn and read a little bit about the apostle Peter. He is just one of my favorite guys in the Bible. Gosh! There's something disconnected in his brain, and God just continues to use him. That's so encouraging to me. Before we read John 21:15 through 22 together, let me give you background.

Jesus is telling the disciples, "Hey, I'm going to be arrested. I'm going to be given over to the Pharisees. They're going to crucify me. Then I'm going to rise again." Peter rebukes him. "That's not true!" You're like, "You've already said this is Messiah. This is the Son of God. Jesus, you're coeternal with the Father."

"Yeah, I'm going to give my life."

"No, you're not."

"No, I am."

"No!"

"Peter, I am."

Then in this moment, they head up, and Jesus is like, "Hey, somebody is going to betray me, and you're all going to flee." What does Peter say? "Not me!" So then Jesus says, "No, no. *Especially* you! You're going to deny me three times before the alarm goes off tomorrow morning! This isn't like a denial over the next month. This is not a slow drift away from me. Brother, very aggressively in the next seven to eight hours, you are going to, with a lot of bad language, deny you know me."

Peter's response to that is, "**Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!**" Jesus was just like, "Do you know what? All right. Okay. Whatever." Then Jesus is arrested. Now let's give Peter some credit here. Peter is like, "Uh, no! I told you that ain't happening!" He pulls his sword, cuts off the servant of the high priest's ear.

Blood is coming out of his ear, and Jesus rebukes him. "Peter, put away your sword. Do you not know that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword? Plus, don't you know that at any moment, I could call out to my Father and have at my disposal thousands of angelic beings?"

Then he picks up the dude's ear, and he puts it back on. That guy continues to arrest him! Have you ever thought about that? That just feels at that moment like, "Oh gosh! You know, I'm out, guys. I have to be out of this. You guys go ahead. That wiggled me out. I don't know what just happened, but my ear is back on. I need to be out."

Then what happens? It's important you know this. The scene shifts to the courtyard, and I think when we read about the denials of Peter, we need to do a better job of reading across the four gospels. It's not like Jesus is like a quarter mile away in another room when Peter denies him. They're in the same courtyard. They're in this courtyard. Jesus is being held. He has already been beaten severely. Now a woman comes up to Peter, who is now trying to hide out just to see what would happen (I'm guessing motivated by some guilt and shame). Then a woman walks up and says, "Hey, aren't you one of the disciples?"

"No, I'm not one of the disciples. What are you talking about?"

"Yeah, I think I saw you with Jesus."

"No, I don't know this man."

Jesus doesn't glance over. Peter probably is looking at the dirt. She comes back again, and she is like, "Oh, man. I mean, I hate to bother you. I know you're trying to get a drink here by the fire, but I think I saw you with him." "I do not know this man!" Now he is agitated. You've been there. "Why do you keep asking me this?"

Now he is a little bit more animated about it. "I don't know this man!" Then the Bible says a third time she comes back around, and she says, "No, no, no. Surely you're one of his disciples, for you are a Galilean." Peter loses his mind. He starts cursing, "I don't know this man! I don't know why you keep asking me this. I want nothing to do with this man."

The alarm goes off, and Jesus looks over at Peter. They make eye contact, and Peter runs out of the courtyard and, according to the Bible, weeps bitterly. Jesus is then crucified. He is resurrected. What

we're about to read is Jesus restoring the foolishness of Peter. Look at this. John 21. We're going to start in verse 15.

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?'"

Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.' (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)"

Church tradition tells us Peter was crucified upside down. They were going to crucify Peter, and Peter didn't think he was worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus, so they hung him upside down. That's how he was to die. So he was dressed and led to his execution. **"And after saying this he said to him, 'Follow me.'"**

So you have this beautiful restoration occurring. Three times Peter denies. Three times Jesus speaks life back into him. "Do you love me? Okay. Obey me. Feed my lambs. Do you love me? Okay. Obey me. Feed my sheep. Do you love me? Okay. Obey me. Feed my children." He is reestablishing. He is building Peter up in all his guilt and shame. Jesus is leaning in. Notice that process is painful and that it grieved him to hear Jesus ask a third time.

Then here's what I want to point out that's so, I think, one of the reasons why I like... He is so encouraging to me. Right? Here's what happens next. Look at this. Look at verse 20. **"Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?'"**

Now here's what I'm talking about! Jesus will discipline those he loves. Look at verse 22. **"Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!'"**

Now I love this moment where Peter is being reestablished. He is being set up by the grace of God. Rather than being emboldened simply to follow Jesus, he looks at John and is wondering, "Is John going to get a greater portion than I am?"

So he asked, "Hey, what about John?" What's Jesus' response? "Are you serious? Are you kidding me right now, Peter? Bro, you are such a train wreck. Why are you worried about him? You have enough issues of your own. Why don't you let me handle John? You worry about yourself." Now if you're like, "I don't see that in the text," yeah, I'm kind of putting it in our imagination. But here's what happens.

From the time you became a Christian to the time you die, you're going to come to these crossroads, the crossroads of obedience, the crossroads of waiting on the Lord, the crossroads of suffering, the crossroads of stepping out in faith, the crossroads of being bold or being coward. The crossroads! What I want to let you see in this text is even when you choose to go left instead of right, even when you choose disobedience over obedience, the love of God remains ever present.

That does not mean there won't be discipline, that does not mean there won't be scourging, but it doesn't mean his love has wavered. In fact, if we just keep following Peter, it's at the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit of God falls. It fills, and Peter (I'm just going to give this to him) preaches an epic sermon. We'll never know the actual numbers until glory, but what most kind of historical theologians would argue is, on the day of Pentecost, 10,000-12,000 men, women, and children became Christians.

Look at me. That's a great sermon! You preach, and 12,000 people become a Christian. Even Billy Graham is like, "Dang!" I mean, this is Peter. Then in Acts, chapter 10, God uses Peter to break Christianity out of simply being a Jewish experience, and the gospel goes to the Gentiles through...whom? Through Peter. Then, man, we're not out of the woods yet because it's not going to be long until Peter acts like a racist against the very Gentiles to whom he proclaimed the gospel. He came, and he refused to eat with them. Paul actually calls him out for being a racist.

Then we get to 1 and 2 Peter, and we see a mature, godly man who through a lot of process was loved by his Father and transformed from one degree of glory to the next. When we're talking about election, we're talking about the love of God. We're talking about the love of God not wavering over his children being ever present, even as they stumble and fall. It's this truth that pushes us *to* him

and not *from* him. It's this truth that emboldens us and enables us to worship him in the most difficult of days. It is this truth that roots us in hope even as we suffer.

So I think in order for many of us to kind of get this, experience this, and understand this... This isn't my illustration. It's an illustration I read about a month ago in a book called *Soul Care*. He talked about a suitcase, so I'll just kind of make it my illustration. I travel quite a bit, so I have a bag. When I leave, my stuff is meticulously packed. I'm a bit weird about that. I'm a bit weird about wrinkles. I don't know why, but it's just meticulously packed. I have this kind of packing system, and it all goes in.

That is *not* the way it comes home, because once I wear it, I don't care anymore. So I get that bag in the closet of the hotel, and then I just throw my stuff in there, then jam it in there, put the shoes on, zip it up, and come home. Now as soon as I get home, I have to take all of that dirty stuff out of the bag. I can't just leave it in there and then open it up on the next trip and try to meticulously put my gear back in. No, no. You have to take stuff out of the bag to put the stuff into the bag.

I'm just wondering if that many of us can't experience the love of God like we're reading it here because we just have a lot of dirty stuff in the bag. If I could kind of tease that out for just a moment, I think anytime you're carrying resentment and unforgiveness in your heart, I think anytime you're dominated by fear, anger, I think if you're walking in secret sin, I mean, God has given you the weapon of confession.

Oh gosh! If you could ever understand that that's a sword you wield not a shield. You want to fight darkness? Confess. Drag stuff into the light. See this as throwing hands with the Enemy. Earlier I said if you're *not* a Christian, come into this love. If you *are* a Christian, and you experience that... Like you can think back maybe three years ago, maybe a year ago, maybe five years, man, for some of you, maybe 20 years ago, and you had this moment where Christ's love became real in your heart, and you were overwhelmed by his goodness and grace.

Over a period of time, you have repeatedly gone left, gone left, gone left. Now you're in this season of your life with Jesus where avoidance marks your relationship with him. You want to stay at a distance between you and the Lord. I want to remind you of this love and ask you to come home. Michael Bleecker about every other week will mention Luke 15 to you. He never mentions Luke 15. He just tells you the story of the prodigal son, which is found in Luke 15.

Rightly, what he points out is that the son, who had devoured the father's property with prostitutes and drunkenness... The father sits on the porch, and he is looking at the horizon waiting for the Prodigal to come home. When he sees him, he gets up, and he runs out to meet him, not to beat him. In fact, the Bible says he embraces him, and he kisses him. He throws a ring on his finger, saying, "You're my son. I haven't forgotten that."

He clothes him in righteousness, a garb of the father. He slays a fattened calf, and they celebrate. You get this. You come home. It's celebration time in glory. Won't you come home? Won't you come back into this unwavering love of God for you? I'm going to just end saying this, and we're going to pray. You can walk out of here without stepping into, leaning into, or surrendering to this love (look at me), but that will be your choice. You'll be the one who says, "No, thank you."

You will not say, "God does not love me." I am here telling you he loves you. You will choose to leave here without it, or you will choose to surrender to it. The invitation has been given. I mean, all week long I have asked the Lord for you, brother, sister, hardened toward the things of the Lord, nominal in your seriousness about Jesus Christ.

Just try to imagine in my thin love for my children what it would be like if my kids were indifferent to me, if they avoided me, if as I sought to heap affection upon them, they rejected that affection, as I longed to bless them, they rejected that blessing, as I was eager just to be near them, comfort them, and cuddle them and have them want nothing to do with that. I was thinking about just how that would grieve my own heart.

Listen. The love of the Father is just here made available in Jesus Christ via the Holy Spirit. You can leave without it, but you'll be choosing to leave without it. Let's pray.

Spirit, help us. We want to see, savor, and be blown away by, encouraged by, and built up by this love. Help us not harden our hearts against you in this moment. Even as the apostle Paul wrote, help us really grasp the depth, the width, and the breadth of your love. I pray this kindness and our understanding of this kindness would lead to repentance today. You are gracious and good. Help us love you with everything in us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.