

Covenantal Love 4/25/2010

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We're continuing a series now on "Scandalous Love". God has been using in some real cool, profound ways in my own life as well as a number of people have testified to this, it's just hitting us in some cool ways. And last week's message, if you weren't here I encourage you to get it. It's on Jesus as the central revelation of who God is and not compromising that revelation with *anything* and how Jesus *trumps* all previous revelations. It raised some questions for people, and that's good! That's good, get people thinking on this theologically. You know, "What do you do with all that Old Testament violence stuff?" That's the topic I'm right now just obsessed with. I've been, for about a year, writing this book; it's up to 450 pages now [Laughs]. And I'm just...so this Q&A [Question and Answer] time on May 11th will give a little snippet of that. At some point I'd like to have a whole day-long seminar on this. I just think it's such an important topic. But if you got questions like that make sure you come to this Q&A time. But this is good stuff. It's just getting people thinking and challenging some of their assumptions.

It was last Thursday morning I was in prayer and preparing for this message and I just got...do you ever have this happen where you just get a "zinger" from heaven? It's like, all of a sudden, God shows up and I was just overwhelmed by the love of God. And the thing about the love of God is, when you even get a little glimpse of that, like a "peek-a-boo", you immediately understand why you'll never get bored in heaven. It's always as though it was for the first time. And no matter how deep you go with the love of God you understand, if you're really getting it, that however deep you are there's an "infinite more" depth to go! You understand how, when we're in the Kingdom after ten trillion years of growing in our capacity and the adventure of knowing God's love and receiving God's love, after ten trillion years we're no closer to exhausting His love than we were when we started. To get its "un-get-ability" is to *get* it. And so I was just experiencing this love and wept for joy. But I also had kind of an ache. Because I want so badly to have words that will help the coin fall in the slot and for people to *get it* and to be growing in this.

And in that moment, as I'm experiencing this depth of love, I am so aware of how utterly, utterly, utterly inadequate words are. They feel almost useless. And I'm aware that there's nothing I can say that can do anything more than kind of point in the general direction. Because, it even kind of frustrates me as a communicator; you just want to find words for it but no words come close. And in that moment I realize, once again, maybe right now more profoundly than I've ever been aware, how only God can reveal God. Only the Holy Spirit can

open our eyes to get it! And so we need to pray, “Lord, open up our eyes. Lord, never let us think that we’ve ‘arrived’ on this one. Lord, help us to always be growing in our capacity to understand this.” Paul says this in II Corinthians 4, he says,

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Satan blinds us from seeing the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ. The word “glory”, by the way, is simply the radiance of his love. And Satan is the one who keeps people from seeing that! It’s a spiritual issue before it’s an intellectual issue or anything else! It’s a spiritual issue. That’s why Paul goes on in this verse and he says this,

“For believers God has made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

God is the one who has to speak light into our hearts. God is the one who has to open up our “spiritual eyes” to enable us to see the glory of God, the shiny, awesome radiance of His love in the face of Jesus Christ. But only God can do that! There’s no speech that can do that! No study, no logic, no anything. Those things can be *used* by God to do that but only *God* can reveal God.

That’s why Jesus in John 17, in His last public prayer (it was just beautiful) He prays that his disciples would *get it*. By that He means this, “Father...” He prays that they would know (His disciples, that’s us!) that *we* would know that the Father has loved us with the same love that He has for Jesus. The same love. Not a secondary love, the *same* love. And then Jesus says, “The glory you gave me before the world began I’ve given them.” And what’s the glory? It’s the awesome shininess of God’s love; it’s His character on display. But only the Father can reveal that through the power of His spirit. *God’s* gotta reveal God. That’s why Paul prayed as we saw in the last two weeks. He prays this prayer that we would be able to have power,

“...together with all the Lord’s people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ [And by the way it’s infinite in all directions], and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.”

“To know that it surpasses knowledge”...now you’re beginning to know it! But only God can empower us to be able to know that. Left to our own natural, fallen, finite selves, our fallen brains, we can’t believe this. It is literally too good to be true. Our fallen mind will always sabotage this with a ‘but’: “Yes, *but*...” We’ll always, in some way, find a way of skirting it. We’re too weak to believe this but God has to empower us to see it.

One of the ways that you know that you're really hearing the true "Good News", as opposed to all the false version of good news that is out there, one of the ways you can know that it's the real version is that only *God* could give you the capacity to believe it. The love that you're hearing is so great your natural mind would say, "It can't possibly be true." So you need to pray, "God, empower me to believe this." The true Gospel has that quality to it. All the false forms of the gospel, well, they're pretty believable on their own terms. Only *God* can reveal God.

So I want to pray now that God would open up our eyes. In fact we always, every service, have people on our prayer team who are praying for the message and praying for people when they're coming in and when they're leaving, but I'd like a little extra dose of that this morning. So, can I get about a dozen people around the auditorium who will raise their hand and tell me that you'll be praying for this message as it's going forth? Just raise your hand if you can keep me covered in prayer. You can still listen, but just sprinkle it in with prayer. Thanks. And be praying that God would use this to open up our eyes. To experience again, for the first time the height, the depth, the width, and the length of the love of Jesus Christ.

Father, open our eyes. Open our eyes; open our eyes. Only *You* can reveal You, and all of your beauty and all of your infinite love, Lord. God, confront the lies in our mind, the "blindness" that the enemy has installed in our head, confront them that we may really see and experience and be transformed by the infinite depth of your love. Only You can do that, Holy Spirit. And Lord, help me to just relax in the insufficiency of my words and to not be frustrated. But to, Lord, know that You can make up the difference. Do it Lord. In Jesus name we pray. And all God's people said...[Audience replies, "Amen"]

Mmm hmm [In agreement]. Amen.

The word gospel means "good news", *euangelion*. Good news. And the good news, the true "Good News" is really, really good. It's, in fact, outlandishly beautiful as I just said. It's so beautiful, if we're really hearing it right, that it's impossible for us to believe it unless God empowers us. The Good News is *good*, outlandishly good. But Gospel that many of us heard, in fact I suspect most people who are hearing this message whether they're in the auditorium or listening through podcast, the Good News, the Gospel that most of us heard, wasn't necessarily that beautiful. It didn't take any kind of supernatural empowerment to believe that. Does this story sound familiar to you? Here's a version that is pretty wide spread. God created us and put us in the garden and then He put us to the test. He put a tree in the middle of the garden and said, "Don't eat of that tree." Kind of like you put a cookie on the table and tell a kid not to eat it. And so we're created and He puts this test there and there's a rule that we're not supposed to eat that tree but we broke the rule and God got mad and He's been mad ever since. And then God worked with the Israelites for a while to rise up a nation trying to fix this

problem and gave them a ton more rules but they couldn't obey the rules either so He got even more furious. Finally, He sends Jesus into this world and He takes out His fury on Jesus and punishes Jesus so that He doesn't have to send us to hell. And that's the "good news". Does that sound familiar? In fact, maybe some are saying here, "Well, yeah, that's what I was taught. What's the problem with that?" The problem with that is that doesn't...there's a vague resemblance between that version of the good news and the real Good News but actually that version I just gave you is a distortion. It doesn't come close to capturing the beauty of the real Good News; the *goodness* of the real Good News. Think about it. Would it take a supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit to believe *that* version of the good news I just gave you? I don't think so. There's nothing unfathomably beautiful about that.

I want to get to the core problem with that version of the Good News which is so wide spread, especially here in America. And to get at the core of what's wrong with that version is to get at the core of what's wrong with *us*. Really, what is the essence of sin. And I can, I think, best get at that by talking about the difference between a *covenant* and a *contract*. Follow me on this. They look similar, a covenant and a contract, but in fact they're very, very different. And if you understand the difference between a covenant and a contract, you'll understand the difference between the version of the gospel I just gave you and the true Gospel. In a contract...a contract is something like an employment agreement, or a purchase agreement, a house purchase, a car purchase, or something of the sort; whereas a covenant is like a *marriage*. In a contract you make a deal. It's a deal between parties; whereas in a covenant (and I'm talking here specifically of a covenant of 'Agape' love), in a covenant of Agape love, it's not a *deal* it's a *pledge*. And you pledge your whole self. It doesn't occur between people, it involves the whole person. It's a pledge of your soul to another person. Contracts deal with *laws*. That's part of the deal, "Here's the laws, here's the rules"; whereas a covenant deals with *love*. It's a pledge of love, Agape love. That's why contracts are always conditional, "Here are the terms. If you break the terms it's off." But a covenant of Agape love is *unconditional* because it's about *you* pledging what *you're* going to be towards another person for better or for worse. That's how God intended it in marriage; you pledge yourself to another person.

That's why contracts are always "evaluative". By that I mean this, there's always an assessment, a "sizing up", a measuring, calculation, "How am I doing in this contract? How are you doing in this contract?" There's always scrutinizing that goes on; whereas in a covenant of Agape love it's just about *accepting*, ascribing worth to the other *as they are*. They can look similar on the outside, but in fact they're radically different.

[Slide]

CONTRACT

COVENANT

Employment/House	Marriage
A Deal	A Pledge
Law	Love
Conditional	Unconditional
Evaluative	Accepting

Our core problem, I believe, is that we construe everything in the world like a kind of contract. We see everything in “contract” terms rather than in terms of an Agape love covenant. The story of the fall in the Bible is, I believe, a story of how we fell from a covenant worldview to a contract worldview. Follow me on this. You know the story in Genesis 3, most of you do anyways. I don’t want to go back and read the whole thing, but in this story it starts off by saying Adam and Eve were just in the garden and they would walk with God in the cool of the day. In the late afternoon, when it was pleasant, they would take walks with God and it’s just a way of the Bible communicating to us that life as God intended it to be was about hanging out in a relaxed way with God; going for a walk with God in a state of innocence. You’re with God, you enjoy God and God enjoys you. That’s what it’s all about. But there was a forbidden tree in the middle of that garden and that wasn’t there to be a sort of “cookie testing” thing (you know, “Don’t eat the cookie!”). It was rather God’s loving “No Trespassing” sign. It was God’s way of saying, “OK, look. Here’s the thing. Be like me in terms of your character. I’ve created you to be like me in terms of your character. And so, extend my character to one another and to the animals and to the earth [that’s our dominion]. But don’t try to be like me in terms of what you think you know. Don’t try to be wise like me. Don’t try to think that you can...that it’s your job to police good and evil. That’s why the original tree is called ‘The tree of the knowledge of good and evil’. It’s a ‘No Trespassing’ sign. Don’t think you can define, it’s your job to define, ultimate good and evil and to police good and evil. I’ll do the judging, you do the loving. And then trust Me for the provision of life. That’s the tree of life. Trust my provision, honor my prohibition and things are going to go wonderful.”

Unfortunately, Satan shows up. Satan in the Bible is called, interestingly enough, “The Accuser”. He does the accusing and he tempts Adam and Eve. He tells them, “Look, the reason why God is holding out on you here is because He’s threatened by this tree. He knows that if you eat this tree you’re going to be like him that’s why He told you not to do it. He doesn’t have your best interest in mind.” He paints a monstrous picture of God and succeeds in seducing Adam and Eve to eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And we have been eating from that tree ever since. Because that story is not just about a “Once upon a

time” thing, it’s about our life right now. And what that story shows is that when we rebelled and when we rebel today we sin into existence a new creature. We bring into existence a kind of humanity that was never meant to be; a pathetic, alien, miserable kind of being as we find ourselves now. And now instead of walking with God in the cool of the day, hanging out with God as God hangs out with us and just enjoying in innocence this relationship, *now* we have this impulse to try to *be* God; to rule our own life, be Lord of our own life. And with that we have an impulse to try to know good and evil, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; this impulse to always evaluate and assess things and measure ourselves up and measure others up. We’re always assessing, evaluating, scrutinizing. The Accuser has gotten into our heads and so we accuse. We become little accusers made in *his* image. That’s the essence of this fall.

We start by compulsively judging ourselves and you see that in the Genesis narrative because Adam and Eve hide from one another. All of a sudden they’re ashamed and they have got to cover themselves with these leaves, these fig leaves. The accuser in us turns against ourselves! It’s like, when we fall there’s a mirror that gets downloaded in our brain and we’re always looking at that mirror. But the mirror is a little distorted. We’re always assessing ourselves, and measuring ourselves, and trying to fix ourselves; always evaluating. It’s as though there are two “me’s” in my head. One’s the accuser and one’s the accused. It’s like...it’s why we’re never really at home in our own heads. We’re trapped in a skull with this voice; the voice is always assessing us. It’s us! We are that, this always assessing, critical voice. We’re self aware, and it can be painful. That wasn’t God’s original design! That’s not innocence. Think about it. In moments when you’ve experienced real love, or real joy, or real peace (and I hope you’ve had experiences like that) part of what makes those experiences what they are is that in those moments the accuser shuts up! We’re not assessing things, “How am I doing? How am I performing? What do others think about me?” Those experiences are peak experiences precisely because for a moment, at least, we return to innocence and we lose ourselves. And there isn’t this hyper self awareness. We’re willing to in those moments walk with our Beloved in the cool of the day in this innocent self abandon. Little children, before they really grow in getting this accuser in their head, there’s this freedom and abandonment. They lose it rather quickly but there’s a “carefreeness” and that carefreeness is because they’re not yet looking in the *mirror* in their head. There’s a freedom that is there. That’s how God intended life to be lived. We download the Accuser into our brain.

On top of that we feel empty. We’re alienated from our Creator who is our source of life. And on some deep level we miss Him. Even people who don’t believe in God *miss* God. They don’t frame it like that but there’s a yearning inside of our hearts; a yearning to be reconnected with our source, our Creator. That’s what we called several weeks ago, in our Easter message, “sehnsucht”. It’s a yearning for this undefinable thing that is never satisfied by anything in this world. There’s this yearning there. And really the yearning is a yearning of the

lover for the Beloved; the yearning I have for my wife if I'm away for a week or so. You just *long* to be back home. But see what happens is because we eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, everything gets filtered through our knowledge of good and evil, and this feeling of yearning, that's alien to us. We were never created to be having that. And so what we experience, how we interpret it, is that there's something wrong with us. We're defective. We experience this as a kind of guilt. And it brings fear into our life. Then, to deflect our sense of defectiveness and guilt and shame, what happens is the accuser in our head turns on other people. The "accused me" in my head starts to accuse other people to *deflect* the accusation. It's a little bit like when I was a kid, there was a time I remember I was trying to do one of those little wooden airplanes that you can fly, and I broke the wing. And I swore. And unfortunately my step-mother was around. So, she was going to give the routine punishment for using foul language in our house which was having to swallow dish soap. That was her...you know she would pour dish soap into your mouth. So she's getting ready to do that, it wasn't the first time I've had that happen to me, but in the mean time something happened with an older sister, a fight broke out between them and then my older sister swore at *her*. And all of a sudden I became kind of inconsequential and I was like, "Yes! Oh that was terrible what she did!" And my step-mother forgot all about me and I was like pointing the finger, "Oh, what a terrible big sister that is!" But see that's what goes on all the time in our heads. It's like, "If I can point the attention at someone else I can medicate a little bit the pain of my self-accusation if I can find something in somebody else that's worse than something I have in my own life." And we see this in the Genesis narrative as well. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, Cain blames Abel and we've been blaming one another ever since. It's the essence of the fall. We judge others to ease the pain of our own accusation, "I may be a glutton but at least I'm not gay." "I may be a gossip, but at least I'm not a criminal." "I may have lust in my brain but at least I'm not actually committing affairs like those people." And see, so much of Jesus' teaching was meant to completely undermine that sort of "scale rating" thing that we do to confront the "judger" in our heads. But that's what we do, we deflect.

And then finally, so we judge ourselves and then we judge others, and then finally and worst of all we judge God. We accuse God. And you see this in the Genesis narrative as well because when God shows up Adam and Eve hide from Him, they're afraid. Now the day before, presumably in the context of this narrative, the day before they were walking with God as a friend in the cool of the day and now they're afraid of their friend. He hasn't changed! But they have. And they're looking at Him now through their stolen knowledge of good and evil and they're assessing and they're sizing up and they're doing it out of the vacuum of their own accusatory being and so they see God as a monster, as a threat to them. They don't see the true God. And so it is that we project our own inner accuser onto God and we make Him out to be the accuser. He's the judge in the sky who's perpetually angry, He's the "Watcher" always watching us; always assessing things, always measuring things up, always putting us against the

scale. He's the cosmic lawyer who's building a case against us for that dreaded judgment day. And that's why we fear death, folks, because we're afraid that that might turn out to be the case. Or for some people He becomes sort of the capricious "Hang Man" who roams the street and sort of hangs people here and there and we're just glad if we got by another day. But God becomes this vicious Hang Man who arbitrarily decides to send a plague, or an earthquake, or a disease, or a famine, or cancer, or decides to take your little child, or what have you. We make God out to be the accuser, and see this is how, Holy Spirit help us to get this, this is how the enemy blinds our eyes from seeing the glory of God, the weighty, the awesome shininess of God's love. He keeps us from seeing that in the face of Jesus Christ. How? Because he installs in us an accusatory posture towards God. He makes God out to be the accuser which means that we're seeing him, the Accuser, as God; which means we're seeing Satan as God. And that's been his plan all along. He wants to be God! And so if he can get us to be viewing him as God, well then he's accomplished his purposes. This is our *fall*! This is the core issue in our existence; this is the original sin of the Bible. We see everything in legal, contract terms. We assess everything! We're always evaluating, always analyzing, and always sizing things up, ourselves, others, God. And see in that framework, this framework of the knowledge of good and evil, there is no place for Agape love, this unconditional love, there's no place for that! Rather, the best you can hope for in that framework, if that's your worldview and to some degree it is for all of us, if that's your framework well then the best you can hope for is a "good deal", a good contract to get maybe let off the hook and acquitted for something you've done wrong.

So when the Gospel is heard, the "good news" is heard and framed in this legal framework, the framework of the fall, well then it ends up being this story that I told earlier. The story is a story of a cosmic lawyer that has a case against us, in fact the cosmic lawyer who pronounced a death sentence against us but Jesus took our punishment instead. The angry judge vented his wrath on Jesus so we don't have to be sent to hell. Jesus was slaughtered by a raging father so we don't have to be eternally slaughtered. And when we hear that story of course we're going to be thankful but we'll be thankful in the same way I was thankful that my sister was taking the beating rather than me. Yeah, I escaped the wrath, but it didn't make me love my step-mother. It didn't make me want to take a walk with my step-mother in the cool of the day. I didn't want to hang out with my step-mother, in fact that way of thinking just confirms why I'm afraid of my step-mother because next time it might be me. It certainly doesn't transform me into being an outrageously loving son towards my step-mother. So also, that version of the Gospel, yeah, it may make you thankful but it's not going to turn your life upside down with passionate, radical love and adoration towards God.

That version of the Gospel, that legalized version, that version that's framed in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that's not the outlandishly beautiful Good News of the New

Testament. That version doesn't require the work of the Holy Spirit to empower us to believe in the unfathomable love of God because that version doesn't have an unfathomable love of God to believe in. It just has a contract that got fixed. That version is a *legal* story not a *love* story. It's a story of how a contract, a broken contract, got fixed; how a contract got tweaked. It's not the story of how an Agape love covenant got fulfilled. It's a story of God saying, "Let's make a deal." It's not the story of God saying, "Let me transform you with my outlandish love." That version of the Gospel is the story of a cosmic lawyer and a story of criminals being acquitted, but it's not the story of the good shepherd desperately looking for the lost sheep, or the story of the woman desperately searching for her beloved coin, or the story of the father of the prodigal son who unconditionally embraces the son even before he gets his speech out. It's not the story of a heavenly husband who will do anything to be with his human wife, his earthly wife. It's not the story of a God who will and has done everything to spend eternity with us.

Folks, the real Good News is not about a contract tweaking "Plan B" that began two thousand years ago. It's a story about an Agape love covenant that began before the creation of the world. The reality is this: God *is love*. We've seen that the last two weeks, I John 4:8, "God is love." God is Agape love. He didn't decide to start loving one day. He's always been perfect, unsurpassable, unfathomable Agape love. He's not the "watcher" in the sky, He's not the lawyer building a case against us, He's always been Agape love and everything about Him is Agape love. He's always been. Father, Son, Holy Spirit united in the ecstatic dance of perfect love. That never *began*, it always *has been*. And before time began, read Ephesians 1, before time began the Trinity has always decided to bring human beings in on this dance. From the beginning God has wanted to become one with us so that we could become one with Him. From the beginning, God the Father wanted to acquire a bride for God the Son. From the beginning God wanted to enter into a marriage-like Agape love covenant with us and have an experience that Paul, in Ephesians 5, likens to the one-flesh experience of a husband and wife; that, from the start, from before the creation of the world, that was God's plan. In fact, that's why the world was created. Jesus didn't come as a sort of "Plan B" to tweak a contract. He's always been God's "Plan A" and He came to fulfill a covenant of love. He came to acquire a bride. That was the plan from the beginning.

Now, of course, Jesus had to die for our sin but that was because the bride that He came to acquire had gotten herself into a lot of trouble. But he didn't become a human and die, Holy Spirit help us to this...Jesus didn't become a human and die because God was mad at us. Jesus became a human being and died because God was madly in love with us. God *is* covenant love. And so He came to fulfill that...this is what a covenant does! This is the nature...it's like this: if my wife is trapped in a house that's burning, I'm going in! I'm going in! I may have to break the door down, I may have to break a window, I may get cut up, I may get burned alive but I'm going in! Because that's what covenant love does. And even if she is in that house for stupid

reasons of her own fault I'm going in! Because that's what covenant love does. Even if she's in that house, trapped in that house, for sinful reasons; she would never do this, but suppose she was in that house to have an affair with some guy and the guy then ties her up and sets the house on fire. And I know that. I'm still going in for her! That's what covenant love does, a covenant of Agape love, that's what it does. And I'm not going in because I'm mad at her, I'm going in because I'm madly in love with her. It doesn't change my desire to want to be with her and I'll trust that my self-sacrificial love is what will win her back to me. That is exactly the position that God is in in relationship to us and that we are in in relationship with God. God has always planned on becoming one with us and acquiring a human bride. But that bride, us, we were unfaithful and we foolishly got ourselves tied up in a house that's set on fire by our own sin and set on fire by the devil. We're heading for destruction. God saw our plight but it didn't change His plan to have a bride. He said, "I'm going in." Not because He was mad, but because He was madly in love with us. Because this is what covenantal love does and God is covenantal love. From all eternity God is perfect, unsurpassable Agape covenantal love.

Jesus gave His life for us not to tweak a contract, or to fix a contract, but to fulfill an eternal Agape love covenant. He gave His life for us not to deflect the Father's wrath but to fulfill the Trinity's covenant love. He sacrificed Himself for us while we were yet sinners to woo us back, His bride back; to win our hearts. And that's why folks, when the thing is accomplished, and it is, He doesn't then scold us for the pain we put Him through. No, read the Gospels. He throws a party. The good shepherd throws a party when he finds the lost sheep. The lady throws a party when she finds her lost coin. The father of the prodigal son throws this enormous party when his son returns home and he unconditionally accepts him. God throws a party. In fact, the Bible says this in Hebrews 12:2, I quote this verse all the time because it's so beautiful:

“...[for] the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

“For the joy set before Him...” He didn't come because He was mad! There was joy in His heart. In fact He says in John, “I've come that my joy may be fulfilled in you”, “I want to share my joy!” He comes with this joy. Why? Because He's madly in love with us and the opportunity to win us back, whatever it takes, going into the burning house and being burned alive, going to hell in this case. Whatever it takes He's willing to do it. Not begrudgingly but because He thinks we're worth it. That's what covenantal love does and God is from eternity to eternity covenantal love.

So long as we're viewing our world from the knowledge of good and evil, that original sin, we can't possibly get that. That's the blinders that the enemy has on us, that first sin. That blinder is our compulsion where we gotta assess, size up, earn, achieve; contract thinking.

When all the while God is saying, “No, no, no, no, no, no. Return to innocence. Walk with me in the cool of the day.” It’s not about a contract, it’s about a covenant; a covenant of Agape love. So I want to end by just praying. The words are so pathetically inadequate. I feel just completely useless up here. But God, when we are weak He is strong and so I want to pray. Holy Spirit, help us to get this. Help us to get this. Help us to get this and to shut up the “buts” in our brain. Pray with me here.

Father (And as I pray I’d like to ask the prayer team to come up here and I’ll invite you if you want to linger around a little bit and enter into some prayer with these folks, maybe to come against lies in your head. Or for any other reason, I encourage you to come up here and do this.) Open our eyes to see, to experience the height and the depth and the width and the length of the love of God. And to know that love that passes all knowledge. Holy Spirit, help the coin to fall in the slot. Wake us up to the deception of the accuser in our brain, always accusing us, always accusing others, always accusing God, always sabotaging the Good News saying, “Nah, can’t possibly be true because it doesn’t fit the grid of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Father, help us to be innocent children who just dance with you. Lord somebody here is worrying that, “Gosh, if this is true then people are going to go out and sin!” And they will because they did it in Paul’s day, they’ll do it now. But Lord, help us to see that the cure for sin is not just more rules with more threats, but rather to be transformed by your love, to be won by your love. To be united with you in your love. To be dancing with you God, oh God help us to see and to have all faith in the world in that love. Thank you Lord for being the beautiful God that you are. Help us to see that we are that sheep that you throw a party for. We are that coin that you throw a party for. We are the prodigal son that you throw a party for. And Lord help us to live our life as that party, dancing with you, singing with you, rejoicing with you, working with you to bring about your will on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name we pray. And all God’s people said...[Audience: “Amen”].

God bless you guys. Go out, return to innocence and spread the Good News! And it really is good.