

Sermon Transcript from May 15th, 2016 The Kingdom Pastor John Mark Comer, Bridgetown Church

Hey. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 10. Isaiah 10. Hey, we are reading through the Bible together as a community. At least a number of us are. This last week was a wild ride, am I right? Yes. Yes. Three of you. We read a lot. We read Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah and Jonah. All in one week. It was crazy. Next up for the coming week is Micah all the way through Zephaniah as well as we start Job. Come on. If you're not in a bad mood yet, you will be. Actually, we're doing a series in a few weeks on Job and the problem of evil that I am just like, ah, I'm like nerding out. It's going to be really fun – and depressing, but really fun.

And then we watched Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Job. Make sure you know about The Bible Project. Make sure you have the "Read Scripture" app. It's free. If you don't have that, that's from The Bible Project and it has you reading every day, has the video every day. In particular, as we're kind of trucking through these shorter books where you watch a video every two or three days. That app is really helpful. And, hopefully you're there to chat about it with your community at your weekly meal.

Now, last week, to kind of help you through this really treacherous part of the Bible, we started a new series on the prophet. This odd, artistic disrupter of the status quo toward the end of the Old Testament. And we said that the prophet undulates back and forth between judgment and hope. Judgment: one minute he's practically screaming at Israel or Judah down in the south. You know, "Hey, you're going into exile because of breaking the covenant, because of idolatry, because of injustice. God's over it. He's done. His mercy is not quite infinite. It's all used up. You're going into exile."

But then, the next minute, he shifts gears to hope and it's like he's saying, "Hey, God's judgment..." – and remember this from last week – "...is like a refining fire."

Meaning His end goal, His aim is not punitive. It's not to punish you. God's end goal for judgment is healing and it's restoration. On the other side of exile, prophet after prophet goes on to say, "You, Israel, are going to come back from Babylon and to resettle in your land and call it home."

So, judgment and hope. Now, last week we looked at judgment and then the plan for tonight is to take a look at hope and how, in the prophet, it starts to wrap itself around – for judgment, it's exile. That's the concrete reality. For hope, it starts to wrap itself around this coming Messiah and His Kingdom of God. So, to start off, Isaiah 10. We're going to move all through the Bible tonight. But, let's start in Isaiah 10. Skip down to the end. It's a weird paragraph break. So, we'll read the end of chapter 10 and the beginning of chapter 11. And, remember, the paragraph break is not there in the original Hebrew.

So, Isaiah 10:33. Isaiah writes this: **"See the Lord, Yahweh Almighty, will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled, the tall ones will be brought low. He will cut down the forest thickets with an ax; Lebanon will fall before the Mighty One."**

Okay, so, here is an example of judgment at play. Isaiah is saying – this is a word picture – "Hey, Israel is kind of like a forest that will be cut down."

And she was. If you know your history, just a few years after this prophecy, because of Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed and every other major city in the south and in the north. The vast majority of the population was deported all the way to exile in Babylon. So, this is a prophecy about the coming judgment. But, notice how Isaiah shifts gears and moves right from that into hope. Look at this.

Isaiah 11:1: **"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;"**

Jesse is the father of anybody remember who? Yes. King David. So, that's a way of saying like, "From the line of David. The royal line of David."

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."

So, what he's saying is, "Hey, don't think that God is done with Israel. Yes, Israel's like a forest that will be cut down to a stump."

I mean, literally. Imagine in your mind's eye. Like, a forest cut down. We have that all over Oregon. A stump. Little or nothing left. But, Isaiah writes, that a shoot – imagine this in your mind's eye – will come up from the stump of Jesse. A Branch – and notice, if you have the NIV, that word "Branch" is capitalized. The Branch here, Isaiah is saying, is a person. Meaning a king from the line of David will grow up out of the stump that is Israel cut down in the exile and Israel will regrow and start once again, because of this Branch, to bear fruit.

And then Isaiah says this: **"The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him."**

This is where we get the title "the Messiah." All that word means in Hebrew is the word "Mashiach." Can you say that with a [throaty sound] at the end? Yeah. Well, no. You all sound like Star Trek fans or whatever. Like Klingon. You know? Mashiach, all it means is "the one anointed with the Holy Spirit." And we see that right here. "The Holy Spirit will rest on him."

And then Isaiah starts to lay out a vision of restoration. Not only for Israel but, we'll see in a minute, for the whole world. An image of restoration under the Messiah's rule and reign, also known as the Kingdom of God. Now, if you're taking notes, go ahead and write three things down.

First off, the Messiah will restore the human condition. The Messiah will restore the human condition. Look at Isaiah 10:2: **"The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord."**

Now, this is not just a random list of attributes as if Isaiah is saying, "He's going to be a really nice guy." This is everything that the Hebrew kings were not. The best of the Hebrew kings, King David or Solomon (at least early Solomon, not late Solomon) or Hezekiah or Josiah got close, but never really made it. Why not? Well, because of a lack of the Spirit of God at a heart level. Isaiah and his prophet friends point out over and over again that what God's people need is a new heart. Not just a king. That's not enough. What God's people actually need and what that king needs and what Israel needs and what you and I need is a new heart.

For example, the prophet Ezekiel writes this in Ezekiel 36:24: **"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land."**

Like, this is a prophecy in the middle of exile. "You're in Babylon, you're in Assyria, you're all over the world. I will bring you back to Israel, I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all of your idols, all of your idolatry, all of your injustice, all of that done; gone."

"I will give you..." – look at this – **"...a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone..."** – I love this metaphor – **"...and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you..."** – that's how – **"...and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be..."** – there's the great refrain of the Bible – **"...my people, and I will be your God."**

This is one sample out of many. I could read to you from Joel, I could read to you from Jeremiah, on and on. In chorus, the prophets say that a time is coming – for you and I it's in the past tense. But, for Isaiah and company, it was in the future. A time is coming when God will pour out His Spirit and something will change in His people, in His human beings, at a deep internal level. The Messiah will give us a new heart.

So, first off, He will restore the human condition. Secondly, the Messiah will restore society at large. Look at Isaiah 11:3.

"He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;" – meaning He's not corrupt – **"but with righteousness he will judge the needy,"**

Now, righteousness is this loaded word, in particular in Hebrew or the language of the Old Testament. Put simply, what righteousness means is right relationships with God, of course, first and foremost, but also with the community of God, with the people of God, your family, for you and I, in Jesus, and in particular with, in the language here, the needy; those at risk in your community. The dominant character trait of this judge here, this

Messiah, is that of justice, in particular for the quadrilateral that we read about last week. The orphan, the widow, the poor and the refugee.

And he goes on to write, **"With justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked."**

That's a word picture, by the way. Read that not literally but literarily. He's not saying Jesus has a sword out of His mouth and He breathes fire. Okay? He's saying that He will cut down the oppressor, not with a special ops team or with a sniper rifle or with whatever, but with His mouth He will cut right to the core of the oppressor.

"Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."

So, this about the healing, not only of a man here, a woman there, but about the healing of the community, about righteousness, about right relationships, about the healing and the restoration of society at large. He will restore society at large.

And then finally, if you're taking notes, the Messiah will restore the cosmos itself. Look here at Isaiah 11:6.

"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat," – who are normally not like really good friends – **"the calf and the lion and the yearling together;"** – and look at this – **"and a little child will lead them."**

Like, read that to your kids tonight. Make sure they know it's the future, not the present, and tell them how cool that is.

"The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox."

Like, even the lion's a vegetarian.

"The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest."

So, in Isaiah's vision here of the coming Kingdom of God, this healing spreads out not only from the heart, but from there to society at large. From there to the animal kingdom, which is so good. I mean, why is it that when we stay up late and nerd out on Netflix or whatever and we see a lion take down a gazelle, why is it that we get sad? Right? Some of you don't, and that's a whole other psychosis that you need to deal with. But, most of us, we get sad. Why is that? I mean, it's survival of the fittest. It's totally normal. Why is there something in us where we ache for peace; not only for society, but even for the animal kingdom and really for all of creation. Look at Isaiah 11:9.

"They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," – and then I love, this is one of the most iconic lines in all of the Old Testament – **"for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."**

Think about that metaphor. Like, how much of the sea is covered by water? Exactly. All of it. That's the idea. All of the cosmos jam packed with the glory – that means the presence – and the beauty of God Himself. So, this healing spreads out from the human heart, then to society at large and then to the animal kingdom and then past that to the cosmos itself. Every square inch of the created order will be healed and restored. Every man, every woman, every child, every blade of grass, every quasar, every black hole that we don't even know the name of. Everything will come under the healing, life-giving rule and reign of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. The restoration of the human heart. The restoration of society at large. The restoration of the cosmos itself. That's what the Kingdom of God is about according to this prophet, Isaiah.

Sounds pretty good, right? Yeah. I'm like, "Sign me up. I'm in."

Now, as followers of Jesus, a millennia later on the other side of the world, we believe, based on Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and more, that Jesus is the Messiah. That this prophecy and every one like it all over the Old Testament is a signpost straight to Jesus of Nazareth. But this is a bit funky, right? It creates all sorts of problems for you and for

me because, in one sense, we read this and it's like, "Wow. This is Jesus to a T."

But, in another sense, Jesus doesn't fit the bill at all.

Turn over to Luke 3. Let's move now into the New Testament. Luke 3. Say goodbye to Isaiah for the rest of the night. Luke 3. And then, when you get there, move down to 21. Here's a great story from the writer Luke.

Luke 3:21: "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

Now, it's lost in translation from Hebrew in the Old Testament to Greek in the Septuagint. Again from Greek to the New Testament. And, if I lost you there, don't worry about it. And then into English into the Bible in front of you. But, this line right here about how heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove, that is – depending on which scholar you read – either a full on quote or, at bare minimum, a really heavy handed allusion to Isaiah 11. This is the writer, the biographer, Luke's way of saying that Jesus, He is the anointed one, He is the Messiah from Isaiah's prophecy, from Isaiah 11 and all over the place. And Luke is not alone.

Turn over to Mark, just a fraction of an inch to the left. Turn to Mark 1. There are four biographies of Jesus in the New Testament. We just read Luke. Now, let's read a bit of Mark. Opening line, he writes this. This is, we think, the first Gospel ever written.

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the..." – what? – "...Messiah [the anointed one], the Son of God, as it is written in..." – where? – "...Isaiah the prophet."

And then he quotes, actually, first from the prophet Micah and then from the prophet Isaiah.

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"—a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

So, that's another prophecy from Isaiah. And Mark is saying, "That's about Jesus."

Now, look down at 14.

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

This is the writer Mark's one-sentence summary of the entire message of Jesus. So, you want to know like, "What was the message of Jesus? Was it love? Was it social justice? Was it the poor? Was it freedom? What was it in one sentence?"

Right here. "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near."

Now, that message would make no sense without Isaiah and all of his prophet friends. Without that entire chunk of the Old Testament. But, if you were a first century Jew and you were to hear a rabbi like Jesus stand up out in a field or in your local synagogue or on the street at the marketplace and say something like that, "Hey, the kingdom of God, it's come near," that can also be translated "it's arrived," man, that would just set off all sorts of bells and whistles deep in this visceral part of your heart. If you were a first century Jew, you knew the Old Testament like the back of your hand. You were steeped, in particular, in the writings of the prophet. And Isaiah was a huge favorite at the time.

And you would think, if you were to hear Jesus say that, "Great. Now it's time for the restoration of the human heart, the restoration of society at large, the restoration of the cosmos itself. We're about to face the resurrection of the dead. Bring it on. Let's go. Let's do this."

And you would be right, kind of, in your expectations. Turn a page or two to the right to Mark 4. So, Jesus starts to do His thing and it's like that starts to happen in bits and pieces, but not really. At least not in the way that people are expecting. And then Jesus

starts to teach in parables. Here's one. Mark 4. Look down about three quarters of the way to the end in verse 30. Are you there? Yeah. Okay.

Mark 4:30: "Again he said this, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.'" – It's just tiny. – "Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

"With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word [of the message about the kingdom] to them, as much as they could understand."

Which, it turns out, was not very much. Now, this is one of the many parables of Jesus. People frequently misread the parables. The parables are not Aesop's Fables. Okay? So, these are not like short stories that have a moral lesson. Although, there are moral lessons in there at times. But, the parables were Jesus' way of teaching first century Jews to reimagine the Kingdom of God in a whole new way. First century Jews had all sorts of expectations for what the Kingdom of God would be like and how it would come about.

Here's a quote from my favorite cessationist of all time, John MacArthur. I can't believe I'm quoting him. I haven't done this in a decade. He thinks I'm demon possessed because I speak in tongues. But, that's a whole other teaching. But, this is actually really good and he's a good scholar. Look at that open mind. That's a little bit of maturity. Not a lot, but a little bit. We're moving in the right direction, people. He writes this about this passage:

"As for them, the kingdom had very clear definitions. It would come in glory; it would come in power. There would be pomp and circumstance. There would be great, cataclysmic events. There would be the punishment of evil doers. They were looking for the music and the horses, the triumph and the wonder, the glory and the show, the publicity. They really anticipated a blazing display of power and glory and majesty and might as their Messiah established His kingdom. But, it didn't happen that way."

Now, it's easy to see where they would get this, right? They would get this from Isaiah 11 and all sorts of other prophecies like it. And they would get all excited about this Messiah who would come. But, what happened is, after the exile and then hundreds of years of oppression, what happens when people are oppressed is they resort to anger and fear. That's when we see a sharp uptake in nationalism. That's where Hitler was born out of. We're even seeing it now, not only in America, but across the world. The sharp uptake in nationalism. Where does it come from? It comes from anger and from fear. Okay?

And, in times after hundreds of years of oppression, first under the Babylonians then under the Medo-Persian Empire, then under Alexander the Great and the Greek and then, finally, by Jesus' time, under the Roman Empire. The empire to end all empires. The Jews had just had enough. They were beat down, they were dirt poor, they were angry, they were scared. So, what understandably started to happen is that people started to highlight all the prophecies that speak of how the Messiah would rule and He would reign from Jerusalem and Israel and He would kick out the nations and all of the nations would bow at the Messiah's feet and He would usher in this golden era of peace and prosperity and everybody would be rich and have a great time.

They would highlight those prophecies, which are all through the Bible, but then they would kind of downplay or sideline or ignore or push to the side all the prophecies about how the Messiah would first suffer and die and then come back from the dead. And we'll take a look at that next time in Isaiah 53.

So, my point here is that Jesus steps into a world with all sorts of expectations about what the Messiah would be like and what the Kingdom of God would be like. We all have expectations. Right? You have expectations for Jesus, for the kingdom, for church. I have expectations. We all have expectations for what we think it will be like. And what Jesus has to do is help people get past the distorted view to the right one to reimagine the Kingdom of God, and He does that through parables.

The parables, essentially, all say the same thing. The Kingdom of God is not what you're expecting. It's different. But it's better, but it's different. But, don't worry, it's better. But, it's not what you are expecting. Now, the point of this parable here, all of that leads me to this: the point of this parable here about the mustard seed, Jesus is saying, "Listen, you're expecting the Kingdom of God to come all at once, but actually it's going to come about

slowly but surely over a long period of time."

I mean, think of how long it takes a seed to grow into a tree. Most of us aren't even old enough to know the answer to that question unless you Wikipedia it. When my wife and I first moved back to Portland, we bought this mid-century house and we did a remodel on it and the front yard was just this hideous, classic 60's, all rhododendrons. And I have this thing – no offense if you're into them – I just detest rhododendrons. I don't know. There's just this thing. There's just a couple things I really, really, really dislike. And it's like, I'm not going to tell you what they are, because it would offend some of you. But, that's near the top of my list. I just have this hatred. I don't know. I need to see a therapist about it, but for rhododendrons.

So, I tore, literally with my friend's truck, we tore all these rhododendrons out of the front yard and we kind of redid it all like minimalist and nice and clean and I plated three treats. This beautiful maple on one side and then these two birch trees on the other side. And that was, what was that, babe, eight years ago? Ten years ago? It was a while ago. Ten years ago maybe? Something like that. About once a year I will drive by our old house just to see how the trees are doing, you know? And they're like two feet taller than they were when I planted them. They're not much bigger at all.

One's a maple. I mean, have you ever seen an old-growth maple? It's like, "Ah." They're all over our city and I just love old-growth maple. This one, it's taller than it was and it's bigger than it was, but man, it goes really slowly. And we planted it, by the way, it started at like six feet, not with the seed. Jesus is saying, "Man, that's what the Kingdom of God is like."

It will start small. And small always feels insignificant, right? Especially in our day and age and our culture where we're all about the big and we're all about the important. This makes life in the Kingdom of God really hard at times because we feel like, if something's not big and it's not important, if it's small and if it's insignificant, if it's normal and ordinary and humdrum and you're kind of nonplussed by it, then we think, "Well, God must not really be in it," right? Because we want everything to be spectacular. Because everything in our world, everything in our city, everything on our iPhone, it's all spectacular. Everything's amazing. Like everything's just, "Wow," it's like this crazy, extroverted, "Yay!"

But, life isn't like that. The internet is like that. Life isn't like that. A lot of life just isn't amazing. A lot of it's like, "Really? Alright. Cool. Not really, but okay."

A lot of it's just normal and it's ordinary and it's life. But, there's a beauty in there, in that mustard seed, in the small, ordinary stuff of life as we seed into the Kingdom of God. What Jesus is saying is that the Kingdom of God is small and that feels insignificant a lot of the time, but it will surprise you. Give it enough time. Don't give up on it. Seed into the Kingdom of God. Plant that seed. Dig around it. Protect it. Watch over it. Water it. Get the weeds out of it. Cultivate it and then just wait. Month after month; year after year; season after season. Let it grow. If you give it enough time, if you stick at it, if you're faithful, then you will be fruitful. But, faithfulness always comes before fruitfulness. So, stick at it and don't give up.

Now, scholars, if you want to take that metaphor and turn it into kind of a doctrine, what scholars call this reality is "the now and the not yet" of the Kingdom of God. It's a shorthand way of saying that the Kingdom of God is now, it's here, it's breaking in through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, the Church, you are the Kingdom of God in our city as the people of God. You embody the rule, the reign of Jesus everywhere you go. So, the Kingdom of God is here. It's in our city. It's in our time.

But, at the same time, it's not yet. It's still future. It's on the horizon. It's yet to come. We live in what one theologian called "the time between the times." What he meant is we live in that tension, this weird, awkward middle between the first coming of Jesus and His resurrection and the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of all of humanity and of the cosmos itself. And the technical term for this is inaugurated eschatology. If you wanted to sound really smart, tell people what we were teaching on tonight. "Oh, you know. Inaugurated eschatology."

What that means is that Jesus inaugurated – think about that word. He set into motion the eschaton. That's the way of saying "the end goal of human history." The restoration of the human condition, of society at large and of the cosmos itself. But, there's still a very long ways to go. But, don't let that bum you out, because it's like a mustard seed. Give it time and it will grow into "the largest of all garden plants with such big branches that the birds

can perch in its shade."

Who would've thought that an obscure teacher from a backwater corner of the world two millennia ago would become the central figure in human history? Not Julius Caesar, not Plato, not Napoleon, but Jesus of Nazareth. Who would've thought that the 120 people, that's it, in the city of Jerusalem, hiding in an upper room a few weeks after Jesus' death and resurrection, would grow and expand and spread all over the known world to the point that just three centuries later – according to historian Rodney Stark – 53% of the Roman Empire was practicing the way of Jesus; following Jesus of Nazareth as Lord.

Wow. And here we are today. A millennia later on the other side of the world, speaking in English for that matter, here we are. Because, it's like a mustard seed. Now, I'm going to start to transition this to you and to me. Here's our problem with this whole mustard seedness of the Kingdom of God. We live, probably more than anybody else ever in human history, in an age of instant gratification. Right? The day of text message and Visa and microwave and, you know, everything. And Elon Musk is trying to get us a train from San Francisco to LA in four minutes. Like that's... how cool is that? That's the world that we live in. Everything right now at our fingertips.

So, I don't know about you – maybe this is just me, but I doubt it even though I'm not going to ask you if it's just me because you'll just be quiet and make me feel bad. But, I don't like this mustard seedness of the kingdom. I don't want to plant a seed and watch it grow over a lifetime. Over past my lifetime. Often, what I want, is something more now. Quick, to the point, more spectacular, more amazing and more exciting. So, what happens for me and I think for a lot of us is we get sucked into the pursuit of other alternative kingdoms that are right now, that are quick and easy with instant gratification, and Jesus is well aware of that.

Turn over to Matthew 6. We'll end here tonight. Matthew 6. This has just been kind of, I don't know, there's like an echo, a resonance, a reverberation in my heart and my mind for the last week or two around this teaching of Jesus. So, this is about three quarters of the way through His sermon on the mount. So, like the most important teachings of Jesus all in one place. And there's this iconic line at the end of chapter 6. Look at 31.

Matthew 6:31. Are you there? Are you still with me? Yes? Okay. Go Timbers. Are we winning? Anybody? Do you have the game on? No? How do you know that? You're clearly not here. Ah! It was a trick. I'm just kidding. Sorry. That was so mean. Maybe I'm not as mature as I thought.

Matthew 6:31: **"So do not worry,"** – this is Jesus. Listen to this. Really let this sink into you. Just take a breath and think about this. Put down the Timbers game.

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"

Or "How am I going to make rent?" or "What will people think of me?" or "Is my outfit cool enough?" or "How long will I be single?" or whatever.

"For the pagans..." – and that's not a derogatory term here, that just means people that aren't followers of Jesus – **"...run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."**

You're His kid. He's your dad.

"But..." – listen to this. Here it is – **"...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,"** – and then I love the black humor here – **"for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."**

So good. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Notice what Jesus does here. He's just so smart. I mean, Jesus is so beyond intelligent. He compares and contrasts seeking the Kingdom of God with "running after all these things." Money, stuff, comfort and status and all of that. The stuff we worry about. In his most recent book, *You Are What You Love*, the philosopher Jamie K.A. Smith writes this:

"To be human..." – notice this first line here – "is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life."

Now, pause for a minute. In his book he points out that this vision of the good life that we all kind of have, it could be called a kingdom, for lack of a better word. Because, it's not just a vision of our own private Garden of Eden, most of us have a vision of a good life that is a vision of society and of the world and even the cosmos itself as we think or we feel like it should be, how it would be better and how our life in it would be better.

God has put deep into the heart of every man and woman and child an ache for better life and a better society and a better world. This is what Isaiah and all the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth and all the writers of the New Testament were tapping into with this motif of the Kingdom of God. So, Smith goes on to say this:

"To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life. Some picture of what we think counts as flourishing."

That's the kind of life I want. And we want that. We crave it. We desire it.

"This is why our most fundamental mode of orientation to the world is love. It's a question not of whether you long for some vision of the kingdom, but of which version you long for. This is true for any human being. It is a structural feature of human creatureliness."

I don't think that's a word. I think he made it up. But, I like it.

"You can't not love. It's why the heart is the seat and fulcrum of the human person; the engine that drives our existence. We are lovers first and foremost."

So, what he's saying is that we all have a vision of the good life. You have one, I have one, your wife, your spouse, your community, your friends have one. Our city has one; very much has one. And this vision of the good life – or if you want to call that a kingdom, not the kingdom, but a kingdom – this is what we build our life around. This is what we want, it's what we crave. So, it's what we spend our money on and our time on. It's what we go to school for. It's what we think about when we're on a run or we're there in bed at night. Or it's what we work for, it's what we pray for, it's what we talk about with our friends, what we dream about. This vision of the good life is what we invest our tiny little span of life into. We just want to see it. We orient our life around the pursuit of whatever vision we have of the good life or of a kingdom.

What Jesus is saying here in Matthew 6 to His disciples – and hopefully that's most of you in the room tonight. I know it's not all of you. And wherever you're at with Jesus, we're just really happy you're here. So, welcome. It's a safe place for you.

But, most of you are followers of Jesus. And what Jesus is saying to all of His apprentices is, "Listen, align your vision of the good life with my vision of the good life."

Because, a lot of the time, they're not the same thing. Right? Or there's overlap, but not all the way. So, Jesus is saying, "Align your vision of the good life with my vision of the good life. Trust me that I know better than you how to live. Trust me that my vision for human flourishing about everything from money to generosity to sexuality to truth to community and individualism, whatever the topic is, I know better. I actually made you and I know how I set you up to thrive as a human being in relationship with God and His community and His world. So, trust. Orient and align your vision of the good life with mine."

And then listen to this. What He's saying is, "Make the Kingdom of God your aim; your magnetic north on the compass; the top priority in your life."

Greg McKeown, in his book "Essentialism," – I'm not sure if any of you have read that. It's a great, fun little read – he makes the point that the word "priority" came into the English language in the 1400's and, for 500 years, it was singular. Priority. There was not a word for "priorities" in the English language until about a hundredish years ago. In the 1900's, in particular in America, we started to talk about priorities, not singular, but plural, as if by changing the word we could somehow bend reality. What that word means, priority, is just the prior or the first thing; the most important thing in our life.

So, the temptation that I think I face as a follower of Jesus in this beautiful city, that my guess is you face, is to make the Kingdom of God one of our priorities along with work and our career that we really are passionate about (and that's not bad). Along with our family and our children and our weekend together. Along with our image; what people think of us. Along with surfing, along with cycling, along with running, along with whatever your thing is. To make the Kingdom of God one of the priorities in your life. "Absolutely. Yeah. It matters to me."

But not the priority; the singular most important, dominant pursuit of your life. And that's what Jesus is calling His disciples, His apprentices, you and me, to make His kingdom, His rule and His reign, what He's on about, what He's up to in our city, His healing, His salvation and His righteousness – remember, that's a community word. His community, the people to your right and to your left, and your relationship with God, first and foremost, and then your relationship with the community around you and particularly the relationship with the "needy" people in our community and in our city, to make that His kingdom and His righteousness. While God is up about in our city and our communal life together. To make that your priority. To make that the dominate pursuit.

Not that you don't have other stuff that you're passionate about. But, that is the dominate pursuit of your life. So, to end, I just want to think about: what does this look like for you and me? Does this mean we quit our job, we abandon our career and we just read our Bible all the time? Is that what it means or does it mean something else? Well, if you back up the teaching to the beginning, the end of chapter 6 is kind of the end of a section. The beginning of a section, look at 21. We actually see the answer right here. Look at this in Matthew 6:21:

Jesus says this: **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

So, to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness is to put, to invest, to leverage your treasure into His kingdom and His righteousness. So the question is what exactly does Jesus mean here by treasure? Well, really fast, first He means our resources. The first thing I would say there is not actually money. Of course that. But, time is the first thing that comes to my mind. One of the most precious commodities that we have, at least here in the West, is time. But, it's an easy resource to waste, am I right? We just had our entire staff do a time log, where you kind of keep track of every single hour for a week or two in your work week and then put it into a pie chart and you talk about it and it was such a helpful exercise.

But, what I find is that even people who are highly disciplined in their professional lives are often woefully undisciplined in their person lives. Right? So, a time log for your free time is actually a really good place to start when you think about your life in the kingdom. Because, we squander our time on so many things. TV. Holy cow. The average American spends four hours a day watching TV. Like, think about that. I just hope that's not true of you and me. Like, I know it's not true of me... because I'm so awesome. That's not what I mean.

Four? I don't know how. Do people not have a job? They definitely don't have kids. Like, definitely. So, four hours a day? That's insane. Social media? Oh my gosh. It is a black hole. People make fun of me, in particular on Twitter, because I don't reply for forever. That's because I took everything off my phone because I just kept getting sucked in. I just do not have the self-discipline to have a job and a Twitter account. I just don't have the self-discipline. So, I took everything off my phone and put it all on my computer. I put it on my schedule. Every Tuesday afternoon I have to go in. I log in and I answer all the Twitter stuff and the Instagram stuff and people just mock me to no end and I could care less, because I actually have a life again and I have time.

It's this black hole. The internet in general. Do you ever just sit down to search for something in the internet and then it's like, "Da da da da," two hours later. Like, where do the time – I think it was Friday. I sat down. It's my day off. I had a two-hour time block to go up to my home office, read my Bible, have a cup of coffee, just hang and be with Jesus. It was a beautiful day and I wanted to get a pair of shorts because the weather's been so hot, which is awesome, and I need a new pair of shorts. So, I went online real fast. That's easy. I'll just go on. I have a couple ethically made, labor friendly, fashionable places I go to. I'll just pick out a pair of shorts real fast. Order it. We'll be good for this great weather that we now have. Awesome.

So, I go on and, of course, the places that I normally go to don't have any shorts that I like. So, then I have to start to search. And I search here. I'm like, "What kind of shorts

are in still?"

When you're 35, you don't know the answer to that question anymore. So, I started to search and I had no idea. I had to text my little brother, who's 23, and likes fashion more than me. And I had to figure it out. And the next thing I know, I was searching Rogue One and there's this thing and Gareth Edwards and he's not directing Godzilla 2. And then I was over to Star Wars VIII and they're in Ireland and they're filming right now and what's that and what planet is that? And, next thing you know, I look down and I had like 15 minutes left and no pair of shorts. Like, that's just – my point is: how much time do we waste on stupid stuff with absolutely nothing to show for it in our relationship with God and His kingdom and what He's about in our life and our world?

You know, at a practical level – and I know I need to be careful here – one of the problems that we're actually wrestling with right now as a church is our attendance. So, our attendance last month was the lowest attendance we've ever had since the first summer when we planted the church. And with it, our giving has been terrible. And it's not, as far as we know, that people are leaving our church. I don't know of a single person that has left our church at all recently. I'm sure there are. But, I don't know about it. I asked Gerald and asked our staff. It's that people in our church just aren't really coming more than once or twice a month. Unless if it's really rainy and then we're kind of all back this Sunday. It's like, "Oh." Because it's not sunny anymore.

And I don't mean that – please don't misunderstand. I don't mean this in pastor, guilt trip mode. Obviously I'm a biased source, mostly because my ego is connected to attendance. So, when a lot of you are here, I just know I'm awesome. But when you're not here and you're outside, I just am in the depths of despair. Just be so glad that you're not my wife for the last month. Just thank God that you're not my wife for the last month. So, I'm biased and I'm biased because I love our church and I believe so much in what Jesus wants to do with us and I so much believe that we need to be here together on Sundays. That something special happens when you put hundreds of us in a room together and the Holy Spirit. People say, "Well, I know I'm gone, but I listen to the podcast. That's great. But, Sunday is not just a delivery vehicle for a 40-minute TED Talk about Jesus in the Bible. That's not even the most important thing that we do. It takes a lot of our time.

But, the most important thing we do is that right there. It's the bread, it's the cup, it's worship, it's how we reorient our heart and our mind around Jesus. So, this is what I'm getting at. I just want to say – take off my pastor hat, take off any guilt trip hat and I apologize if it's there. Just brother-in-Jesus hat or as one of your pastors or one of your leaders here and I love you and I care about you and I want the best for you and I want the best for our community. Remember: we come together, not just to hear a teaching. Like, we could do that with a podcast on a run. We come together, not just to sing a little bit of music. We come together, not to eat a cracker and a cup. We come together to reorient our heart and our love around Jesus of Nazareth because we live in a city that just sucks our heart off to the side. Time after time after time. Distraction after distraction. Worry after worry. Love, love. Alternate kingdom after alternate kingdom. Our heart through the week starts to drift and slide and move away from its fulcrum point, Jesus.

So, we come here. This habit of coming together with all the people of God in our community week after week. We eat, we drink, we open the Scriptures, we reorient our heart, our mind, our life. We worship God. God, You're Lord. Not money, not stuff, not fame, not how many followers I have on whatever. You. You're it. You're what life is all about. That's what happens and we need that. Families, you need that. I see this so often. Like, soccer season comes and you don't see a family for three months. Mom and dad, with all due respect, what are you teaching your children? Your children learn way more through what you do than what you say. Your life is a living teaching to your family.

Are you teaching your kids the wrong kind of priorities? That the Blazer's playoff or whatever is more important than the bread and the cup and the center of Jesus? I don't mean that in a guilt trip way. I just mean I think there's a moment where we need to check our heart. Like, what does our church attendance say about the orientation of our heart if the second that it's sunny outside or the Blazers are in the playoff – which was pretty awesome, by the way, and I don't even care – or a friend is in town from California or there's a wedding or we're tired that day or little Johnny has the sniffle or whatever, if the second it's not easy or it's not convenient we just bail.

And I get it. I'm a parent. I have three kids. Wow. I get it. But, man, what does that say about our heart? So, I say that not to guilt you at all. At all, at all, at all. I get it. I say that because, man, our time is one of the most precious commodities we have. Where is it

that you orient, that you prioritize your heart; your time? Because this is about way more than an hour and a half block. This is about your heart.

So, our time, of course our money. I won't... As long as we're on a popular topic. I won't devolve here into a pitch for giving money to Bridgetown, although that would be great. But, there is no better litmus test of where your heart is actually at than where you spend your money. You want to actually know what your heart is at, what you really love, what you really prioritize in your life? It's really easy. Just pull up your bank account when you go home tonight and look at your money. And I get that there are seasons of life. I get it. We live on one income. We have three kids. We're in the city. It's expensive. We don't have a lot of money right now to be generous. I get that. But, are we living into the generosity and the way of Jesus? Generosity towards our community, generosity towards each other, generosity toward the needy in our community and our city and around the world.

Is that a marker of where – the reason Jesus is so interested in your money is because He's really interested in your heart; in your love. That's what He wants. Not just your time and your money. He wants your heart. He wants your love. And where you put your money usually is a great indication of where your heart will follow behind.

So, first, our resources. Then secondly, and really fast, is just our gifting. Every single one of you, you've been endowed by your creator with a natural gifting, a talent, an intelligence. Plus, as followers of Jesus, all of that is animated by the Holy Spirit Himself. And then some of you have education and background and platform to follow Jesus. What are you doing to leverage all of your gifting for the Kingdom of God?

Then, finally, love. Jesus wants more than your time and my money and our skill set. He's after our heart. That's why He's interested in our treasure. He wants your love and He knows the two are linked. So, what is it that you aim your heart at; your mind at? What is it – listen, here's a great indicator – that you let consume your imagination? Is it a fear, is it an anxiety, is it a thing, is it a status symbol? For me, most of the time, it's like the next thing, the next success, the next thing I want to do and accomplish and accumulate with my life. What is it that you let consume your mind and your heart? We live towards what we want. So, is it the Kingdom of God?

So, to end, I really want to make sure we don't slip into any guilt here or any shame, but I do just want to end with a moment of soul searching. You know, our church's summary line is "In Portland as it is in Heaven." That's what we want to see. The Kingdom of God come in Portland as it is in Heaven. But, just because we have that tag line on our church website doesn't mean it's true of our church or of me or of you. So, I just want to end by just doing a little soul searching as a community and then for each of you as a follower of Jesus. What vision of the good life are you living into? And, is it the same as Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God?

Our city has a vision of the good life, right? And it's really compelling. The food, the drink, the urban planning, the outdoors. The urban planning template from the 1970's that we're all reaping the benefits of (minus the traffic and cost of living and whole bunch of other things.) But, other than that, we're reaping the consequences – not consequences. Or benefits, depending on your perspective and income level.

We're reaping the benefits of – it goes back to 1970's. You can read it. It's online. At the top of the city plan is this line: "Portland's not a place. It's a way of life."

So classic. Like, 30 years before Portlandia. "Portland's not a place. It's a way of life."

It's so true. Our city has a vision of the good life, and it's so compelling that it's easy to get sucked in to the pursuit of a vision of the good life that has little or nothing to do with Jesus and His kingdom. Inevitably, we come up empty because our city promises what it cannot deliver. Our city is fantastic. But, no matter how good that almond cashew milk latte is, it will not satisfy the ache in the marrow of your bones for joy and peace and meaning and satisfaction and beauty. That's because, as great as this city is, it's not the Kingdom of God. Our inner ache will never be satisfied by anything other than Jesus.

So, in end, what would it look like to reorient your life, my life, our shared life as a community, around the Kingdom of God? To make that the priority, not a priority, the priority? To build our entire life journey around a trajectory straight at His kingdom and His righteousness? Even if you feel like, "Man, I just don't have much to offer. All I have is

a little mustard seed," Jesus can do a lot with a mustard seed.

"All I have is this little two-year-old pooper, literally. That's all I have."

Jesus can do a lot with that.

"I'm a student. All I have is this crazy dream of what I want to be one day."

Man, plant it, seed it into the soil of the kingdom.

"All I have is my job and my career. And I love it, but..."

Seed that into the Kingdom of God.

"All I have is this prayer. I feel like God wants to do. All I have is this gift."

Whatever you have. Even if it's a tiny, minuscule mustard seed, plant it, water it, let it grow, give it time, don't burn out, don't give up, keep at it. It will grow into something beautiful in God's time. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Let's stand and pray.