

## ***Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Complete Obedience***

I am calling this my “Christmas message.” I am calling it “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” It is the gracious, wise, passionate beckoning of Jesus to our hearts and to the place of full obedience. That is where our delight is. That is where our greatness unfolds. That is where our spirit is bright. That is where the Devil is judged in our lives when we move. We say yes to Him, but I am not picturing this yes to come out of obedience. I am picturing the delight, the freedom, and the happiness of a bright spirit in this age; then the fullness of the vindication of those decisions in the age to come.

It’s as if the Lord in His greatness and in His glory is saying, “Please do this. Believe Me. I did it as a man, and I am glad I did it. I promise you. You will love this path, if you say yes to it from the heart.” He said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:30). It is the easy yoke. It is easy only if we say yes with 100 percent. If we say yes mostly but not entirely, the yoke is hard—it really is hard.

### **100 PERCENT COMPLETE OBEDIENCE**

If we say yes 100 percent of the time—I do not mean attainment—I mean the pursuit. There is a difference. I never attained to 100 percent of what I have set my heart to in God. But the pursuit of it releases a dynamic in our spirit that truly has life, power, and delight in it. The yoke is easy only if it is His yoke because He said to put His yoke upon us. His yoke was 100 percent obedient to His Father. There is a lot of teaching on the grace of God today that minimizes wholeheartedness, as though it is doing us a favor when it is not. Whenever wholeheartedness is minimized, it condemns the believer to a dull spirit and to spiritual boredom.

Beloved, that is a difficult yoke. It is as if Jesus said, “My yoke—I walked as a man on the earth. I know that I am telling you that My yoke is the easy yoke. 98 percent obedience—I am talking about the pursuing of it. I am not talking about the attaining of it.” That is a whole other issue. The pursuing of 90 percent obedience, when we compromise on the one issue where we say, “No, Lord—not yet,” it shuts the vibrancy dimension of the heart, and the emotions—it shuts it down. It really does.

### **ONE NO CAN SHORT-CIRCUIT 100 PERCENT OBEDIENCE**

It is like the little boy who gets the train set. You can plug that little train set in, but the whole power, light, and electric plant of Kansas City cannot move that little train if there is a piece of metal on the tracks. The metal short-circuits it, and the entire power of a city cannot move that dinky train if it short-circuited it.

An issue in our heart where we say no to Him short-circuits the power dynamic and the vibrancy. So many believers are so comfortable, familiar, and accustomed to living without a vibrant heart; they do not have a sense of the suffering of loss that it is. They are accustomed to it.

They say, “Hey, I have lived with a mostly dull spirit for so many years that I do not sense the loss in having a dull spirit. There is double power.” It is not an actual number, but there is a double power dimension when we go to 100 percent. That is what Jesus is beckoning the Church into. He says, “Remember that it is My yoke. It is My yoke. Do it My way. Live before the Father like I did. Now the 100 percent pursuit is different than the 100 percent attainment. I do not know that we will ever attain 100 percent when we look back to see that we walked in perfect obedience.” I have never had that month before.

### **100 PERCENT PURSUIT DOES NOT MEAN ATTAINMENT**

But I know what it means to set my heart to obey in every area, and when I fail, to call it sin, to call it compromise; to ask forgiveness, push delete, and enter right back into the war against sin—but with confidence before God that He is enjoying me right then. If I do not have the confidence that He is enjoying me, it is really hard to go hard after this thing, but if I do not confess that as sin, declare war against it something is out of line in my heart with the Lord.

### **BARTLE HALL PROPHECY: A NEW APPROACH TO HOLINESS**

Roman numeral I. Jesus is passionate about us having a vibrant heart. I have here the words that Paul Cain gave about the Bartle Hall gathering. He prophesied that the Lord would bring this young adult worship movement down to Bartle Hall. He said this eighteen years ago. It was January 1990 that he saw Bartle Hall. The Lord would raise a banner of holiness over it. He would release revelation and impartation for people to get free, impartation to break bondages, and to walk in a new way with God in terms of holiness—a new approach to holiness.

The new approach to holiness is not new to the New Testament; it is only new to contemporary Christianity, which means the new way to holiness is the old way. It is the New Testament way, but in our culture, there has been for decades a new presentation of holiness that is not in agreement with the New Testament. So the Lord is calling for a new approach to holiness. It says in Hebrews 10:19: “Boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way.” It is a new and a living way. It is the word *living* I want to focus on; the right approach to holiness within our contemporary context is a new approach. Remember the new approach is the old proven one from the New Testament. It is living. It has a vibrant spirit. It has that spark from God on our spirit. It is living. It is not boring. It does not cost more than it is worth. It does not cost more than it is worth. It is worth far more than it costs us because it costs Him so much. It is a living. It is an approach that brings living understanding and power to our spirit. It is an approach that is a living approach. It is a living way. Just go back to The Kingdom of God 101 (101: an introductory-level university course). We cannot go back to this passage; I mean we cannot go back to this idea too many times. I say it every single week. I try to say it every week actually. But if I did say it every week, it would not be too often.

### **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: THE CORE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM**

Roman numeral II. The core value of the kingdom is Sermon on the Mount Christianity. That is the only kind of Christianity that is in the Word of God. There is no other kind. We have developed in our nation a new type of Christianity, but it is not the New Testament form of

Christianity. It is some kind of hybrid form that has morphed into something that is not the true thing that the apostles taught. Any form of Christianity that is not beckoning people to the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle is not an authentic, true presentation of the Word of God.

The litmus test of a successful life is the Sermon on the Mount. I want to be successful, and therefore, I need to know this litmus test. It's as if the Lord says, "Mike, you'd be successful if you develop the eight beatitudes in your life. That is it. You do those eight; you are successful. If you do not do those eight, then you are not successful. You can have the largest ministry, the biggest business, millions or billions of dollars, millions of people, power, and miracles." But if we do not develop these eight, we are not successful in life. All that stuff will pass away.

### **ALL YOU BRING TO HEAVEN IS LOVE**

The only thing we bring with us, you could say it in a sentence. The only thing we bring with us is love. But let's say it in the Sermon on the Mount. The only thing we bring with us is the development of these eight beatitudes in our spirit during our brief time upon the earth. The foundational call of the Sermon on the Mount is the eight beatitudes.

It is the eight beatitudes. Now, notice as we are pursuing one hundredfold obedience: that is the foundational call of the Sermon on the Mount. I do not want to break down the Sermon on the Mount. A couple verses after the eight beatitudes, because the eight beatitudes is Matthew 5:3-12. Then there is the passage about how you can become light and salt, which means we will only make an impact in society to the degree we do the eight beatitudes and impart them.

### **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM**

Make no mistake about it. I am now developing the Sermon on the Mount. Make no mistake about it. Matthew 5:13-16: it is just hanging right there. We cannot be light and salt in society except if we embrace the eight beatitudes and we impart them. That is the only condition of which light and salt is released through the kingdom of God on the earth. So the light portion is now behind us.

Now we look at Matthew 5:17-19, and Jesus invites the people to greatness based on these eight beatitudes. If you study the logic of the Sermon on the Mount, you understand the call to greatness in Matthew 5:19: "Whoever breaks . . . the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom . . . but whoever does and teaches them . . . shall be called great." This is one of the great statements in the Word of God about our weak, broken lives. We may not have much education. We may not have much gifting. We may not have very many friends. We may not have an anointing in ministry that anybody can discern, but beloved, it does not affect your pathway to greatness at all. None of that does. This is one of the great statements in the kingdom—in the whole Word of God. I love this. It gives everybody help. Everybody stands before the Lord on an equal basis. The judgment seat of Christ is the great equalizer of humanity, of history.

### **PARADIGM SHIFT IN OUR HEART TO POSITION OURSELVES FOR GREATNESS**

In Matthew 5:19, Jesus said: “Whoever breaks . . . the least of these commandments,” and He is talking about the Old Testament, but through the grid of the eight beatitudes that He just taught. He is talking about if anyone minimizes the least commandment God gave in the Old Testament as it relates to the eight beatitudes. We are not looking for obscure interpretations of the law. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about in as much as it is in the flow of the eight beatitudes. Some people have taken this, and they lay aside the big stuff. They go after trying to do their food and clothing in strange ways, or trying to out do Moses. I say, “No. That is not really what this is about.” This is about the eight beatitudes, and how God has called them forth through the Old Testament teaching.

Look what He says in Matthew 5:19, “Whoever breaks . . . the least of these commandments, and teaches men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom . . . but whoever does and teaches them . . . shall be called great.” This is talking about born-again believers in the age to come. Now you know, we say it all the time here. Some of you are new, so I will say it for a moment. We are not going to go away to heaven when we die. Between the cross and the second coming, we go to heaven. But in the second coming, heaven is coming down to the earth. Heaven is coming to the earth. Beloved, in the age to come, we will have material physical bodies with all of the properties of the supernatural dimension of the resurrection. We will be on the earth—physically and supernaturally on the earth, we will eat food. We will love it. None of it will be bad for us. We will learn. We will learn. We will have friendships. We will have a ministry. We will teach. We will build. We will work with the dimensions of the resurrection on a material earth. It is glorious.

### **THE LONGING TO BE GREAT IN GOD’S SIGHT IS FROM THE LORD**

Let me tell you this: our preoccupation, our desire for greatness—all of us have a preoccupation with greatness, whether we know it or not. A lot of us do not have language for it. We hunger for it even though we might not understand that we hunger for it because God put it into our spirit when He designed us. You cannot repent of the desire for greatness.

You can only repent of the desire of pursuing it the wrong way, and then the wrong application of it. The great God created us in His image to be great. You cannot figure out some way to let go of this longing, and this impulse in your spirit without something major breaking in your psyche. You may say, “I am not going to pursue greatness in the eyes of men now.” OK, that is good. Why? You might say, “I want the Lord.” You are pursuing greatness in the right way, but it is still the pursuit of greatness.

Jesus beckons us to it. You cannot get rid of it. I have never met anybody who embraced demotion as an end in itself as a glorious thing. Now there are seasons of demotion in natural things, but the reason we are excited even in the midst of the pain because we know that in God, something is increasing. That means we are on the pathway to greatness.

It is as if Jesus says, “Well, in the kingdom of heaven, and I am talking about the physical, resurrected earth with a physical body with good food.” I always like to throw the good food in.

When we hug each other, we will not pass through each other. You will let go. It is like, “Wow. Come back, let’s try that again. Wow. Slow down.” It is not going to be that way. When you hug me, you are going to hit the rock, man!

In the age to come, amongst the born-again community of believers—now, born-again believers are the only type of believers who are there—I mean Old and New Testament believers. There will be the least, and there will be the greatest. It will be real. One guy says, “I will not care.” Well, if you do not like demotion, you love greatness now. Even if you do not have language for it, you just like things to get better. Let’s just call it that. You are thinking, “I’d like things to get better than to get worse.” There you have it. That is the pursuit of greatness. It really is. If you have a passion for it now, do not imagine in the resurrection with a fully renewed mind, you will have less passion for it then.

Some people imagine that they will wake up in the resurrection and they will not care about these biblical values. It is not just that they are biblical. They are born into our spirit. They are designed in our spirit by the great God. We will care about our place, our role, and our connection to the Lord.

We will care about all of these things in the age to come even more than we do now because we will have more wisdom and understanding then. But there will be those who are called least, and those who are called greatest. Here is what He says.

He says in Matthew 5:19: “Whoever breaks . . . the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom . . . but whoever does and teaches them . . . shall be called great.” The least are the ones who do not obey these commandments, and they teach others not to obey them. In other words, they find Bible verses to minimize the beatitudes as a lifestyle. That just boils it right down. They find Bible verses; it is always the verses about grace to minimize hundredfold obedience. I tell you, beloved, you can find a thousand people to back you up on those Bible verses, but it will not stand true when you stand before the Lord on that day. I am not interested in you patting me on the back saying that I am doing well, if I stand before God and He says “No.”

#### **LIVING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE**

They had no discernment. Why did you take that as from God? They had no discernment. Look at their life, and consider the source. I want the voice of God saying that you are doing well. That voice may come through some of His servants. I am saying that I am just not comfortable in my pursuit before God of just relaxing because a bunch of folks think I am doing well. That will get me nowhere, where I am going. Like one guy said, “You do not need to do this. You do not need to do that. You need to lighten up and settle down.”

I responded, “If you can promise me that your vote counts where I am going, I will listen to you. If your vote does not count on my life and where I am going, I love that you love me, but no thanks.” It says that they will be called great, if they do and they teach it.

Now do not imagine that you only have a teaching ministry, if you have a microphone on a Sunday morning platform. No. You have a teaching ministry one-on-one to a child in your home, to a spouse, to a friend, to a neighbor, to somebody in the workplace.

If you talk to a person, write to a person, or sing to a person, you have a teaching ministry. There is a tremendous amount of inertia and momentum for people to do and teach in a way that brings down urgency for the eight beatitudes. Now what I am doing here today: I am contending for your greatness, but I have sanctified selfishness in there. The Lord says, “If you will tell people to do this, I say, ‘I am in.’ I see my name on this verse. I am going for it.”

There is a reason I repeat this week after week. I call it sanctified selfishness. I want it going down in the record of heaven that I pressed this stuff at every angle. It is going down to whatever degree we do it, it is written down. Malachi 3:16: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and meditate on His name.” He writes it all in the book. There are many verses in the Bible. He says, “I will take your conversations, and I will write them down.”

So talk people into the eight beatitudes. Do not go on a popularity contest and show yourself more graceful than God is by freeing people from the spirit’s wooing to go deep in God. Do not free them in some miscalculated version of grace. Press them to go into God. It will liberate their heart. It is the true pursuit of happiness. It is where the vibrant heart is. Now it is the high point of the Word of God and the high point of the Sermon on the Mount. This is it.

### **PERFECT OR COMPLETE OBEDIENCE BY WALKING IN THE LIGHT**

Matthew 5:48: “You shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” In one sentence there it is. That is the pinnacle of the kingdom of God. This is what sums up our life mandate during our seventy years on the earth—eighty due to strength, Moses said in Psalm 90. Now obviously some live more than seventy or eighty years, and some live less than seventy or eighty, but that is what God has apportioned to the human race—seventy or eighty years.

We have one primary issue to settle. The first issue is, “Do we want to be in God’s family?”

It’s as if the Lord says, “My family is based on love. I do not want anyone in my family who does not love Me and My ways. Nobody has to be in My family. Nobody is forced. There are no forced adoptions; nobody is in My family, if they do not love Me and My ways.” Then after that issue is settled, we have the second primary issue in our life, our seventy years on the earth. Do we want to be a part of the government in the age to come?

These are the two big issues: do we want to be in the family? Do we want to be more near the Lord in our work assignment in what we are doing? Everything that we do will be dear to His heart, but there are things that will have greater authority and proximity to what He is doing directly. I want to be a part of the government. I want to be in the staff meetings where the man Jesus is sitting around talking. I want to be one of those guys in one of those rooms, in one of

those places in the earth; He will have all kinds of gatherings and leadership times. Do not imagine He is going to wave His hand, and everybody just kind of wakes up. That is it. We will have personal interaction with Him, just like the apostles did in the age to come, and there will be millions with interaction with Him at that level.

Now by the Holy Spirit, everybody will connect to Him, all the billions. The two to three billion in redemptive history, counting the great revival—everybody will be connected to His heart, and have access to Him by the Holy Spirit. But I want access to Him in the natural as a Jewish man, standing there talking face to face. I want Him to say, “Mike”—you know, maybe He will say, “How is IHOP–KC going in Kansas City? You gave a big shot at it during your first run. You know what. I gave you another assignment. How is it going?”

Now I know everybody must be in Jerusalem. There are going to be about three billion saints, and not everybody is signed up to the fifty-six governmental positions in Jerusalem out of three billion. (I made up the number fifty-six. It is not a biblical number. It is not a prophecy; that was just talking fun.) Jerusalem sounds cool. I will take Kansas City, if that is what the Lord says.

But believe me: we will have governmental assignments all over the earth, just like we do now by the Holy Spirit commission. But we will have direct interactions with Jesus, face-to-face interactions related to our work assignment. I am talking about the Man Jesus. Yes. Fully God, but I am talking about the man in a human body, talking face to face with Him about our assignments. That will only happen to the several million (a made-up number) of the billions that are in government. The majority are not in the government.

The Lord essentially says, “You can be in it, if you want it. You can be in it if you want it, but it is based on one thing—the eight beatitudes. It is based on this one verse: be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. That is the summation of the cry to the eight beatitudes.”

### **BE PERFECT AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT**

The whole Sermon on the Mount is about this: be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. That sounds like a really heavy mandate. It is actually not at all. It is the easy yoke that I talked about a minute ago. What is this verse saying? First, it is making a comment about the nature of the Father. All the ideals that the Father has of truth in love and goodness, He walks them out 100 percent of the time, forever. He has no gap between His ideals and His actuality in terms of His decision-making, and the things that He does. There is no gap. He perfectly walks out all the light He has. Now, He has all the light. But that is not the point, that He has it all. The point Jesus is making here is that He gives expression to everything He possesses with light. That is the point: He says, “Now, you do the same thing. He is not saying here we have the same measure of light.” He is saying that we have to have the same commitment to the measure of light that we have.

Do you know a brand-new believer, one day old in the Lord, one week old in the Lord, can pursue 100 percent of the light that they have? They only have like one issue. Do this different and forgive that one guy. That is it. It is like, “Hey, I am obeying 100 percent.”

It's as if the Lord says, "That is good for now. Just do that, and the guy will feel a vibrant spirit." That is why so many new believers have a vibrant spirit for a few months; they are just so enthralled by the new experience of being born again, and they are fully obedient. The measure of light is small, but they are obeying 100 percent. That is where the vibrancy comes from. A month goes by and a year goes by. Then other areas come in, and they begin to neglect the Holy Spirit's leadership.

Whatever measure of light God gives us, if we obey that measure, then God gives us more.

### **"IN YOUR LIGHT, WE SEE LIGHT"**

David said it in Psalm 36:9: he says, "In Your light, we see light." Psalm 36:9 is one of those glorious verses. "In Your light," meaning "if we are in the light, and we respond to it by obedience, we get more light." Now the more light requires a greater response, but it brings greater feeling of God's presence. It brings greater connectedness with God. It brings greater reward. It brings greater power. Yes. It is a greater requirement, but the benefits are awesome.

Psalm 36:9: "In Your light, we see light." It is the illustration I use so often in the microscope. They put the slide under there, and they clean the slide off; they put it under there, they look in the microscope, and they see the dirt on it. So they clean the slide, then they turn it up to ten power. The dirt is not all gone, so they clean it, put it under, turn the microscope up to one hundred power. There is still dirt on there. Clean it up, put it under the microscope, turn it up to one thousand power. There is still dirt!

We did not see that. Whatever measure of light we have, if we will respond to it by saying yes, and we begin to get breakthroughs in those areas, the Lord will turn the magnifying power up and give more light. The dirt is still there. The dirt is always there. The dirt does not trouble the Lord.

It is our response to the light that He is troubled with. I have so many issues in my life that I do not see that. When I am standing in a million power light, face to face with Him, I will say, "Oh my goodness."

It's as if the Lord responds, "Oh, I saw it all, and I liked you every step of the way."

"Lord, how could You bear that?"

He says, "No. That was not a problem with Me because you were saying yes to Me each step of the way, and I just kept turning the power up." So when He says *perfect*, the word *perfect* is the word *mature*, or you could put the word *complete*.

Have a full responsiveness to the light you have: that is what He is saying according to these eight beatitudes. If you and I will obey the light, we have we are fulfilling Matthew 5:48, and we will get to the right place at the right time under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

I do not have to worry about the dirt in my heart that He will show me in two years. It's as if He says, "I will take you step by step, but you must obey Me." What happens is we draw back, and we begin to neglect the Holy Spirit's leadership in various areas.

**SPEECH, APPETITES, TIME, MONEY, MAKING A COVENANT WITH OUR EYES**

I am going to give you the five areas. I have said this, if you have been around—those of you for years here. You could finish the sentence, but it is worth repeating over and over again. I love to put these five areas out.

Speech, our physical appetites—there are several dimensions. I am not just talking about sexual appetites. I am talking about how there is a number of dimensions, and what we do with our body that stimulates our body illegally and legally—our physical appetites. Our time, our money, and our eyes: I have found over the years that if I obey the Holy Spirit—and I do not fully obey Him in those, but one thing I do is I try to consciously seek to obey Him. I'm consciously seeking to, and every day He shows me where I did not fulfill that which He called me to do. I say, "Ah, again, again." I am so used to it these many years later that I am not troubled by it in the sense where I think me and the Lord are disconnected. Here is why: because I seek to obey Him on those. I mean, to pursue them. I come up short all the time in the various areas, but it is not the coming up short that troubles our walk with God. It is the failure to admit it, and to resign into the battle to war against disobedience in those areas.

Beloved, it is not enough to just have a nice little ministry position on the org chart, put a little bit of money in the plate every now and then, hang out at the prophetic conferences, read the couple key books, get some cool IHOP–KC language, and then you are in. No. It's as if the Holy Spirit says, "I do not want you to obey because I am oppressing you. I want you to obey because it is where life and liberty exist. It is where your heart will feel the most. It is where your greatness will come out. It is where your nearness to God—where the Lord gets the most out of the relationship with you that He loves so much." This is not about oppression. This is about liberty in life. So when the Holy Spirit essentially says, "Mike, I want your speech. I want your appetite, your time, your money; I want your eyes," it is not that we say, "Lord, You are being a little heavy-handed."

He says, "No. I am just committed to your greatness. I am committed to you having a vibrant spirit. I want you to feel more. I want you to know and experience more. I am committed to your grand experience in life. So do not have a paradigm that this is heavy."

Let's count the cost of obedience. Beloved, let's count the cost of disobedience. You know Dietrich Bonhoffer wrote the famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*. Someone needs to write the book called *The Cost of Non-Discipleship*. It costs a whole lot more to not be a disciple than it does to be one and have broken relationships.

Do you know how much it costs to get a demon? For real—it is so expensive to feed the demon, to keep those habits going, then to get tired of it because your life breaks, and then you have got

to pay tons of “money” to get rid of the demon. Then you have got a couple of years to fix it all—that is so expensive. Demons are really expensive. I am serious. Years—lots of family is lost, lots of money is lost. Jesus is not talking about the high cost of obedience. He would point out the high cost of disobedience.

Life is in these five things. I mean, it is in the Holy Spirit, but it is in these five areas. I am not trying to fake God out; I am trying to get on the joy ride of my life by these five areas, by these onramps to experiencing God in my inner man. I want a happy spirit that is fascinated and confident in God, alive and feeling His presence. This is what I want. This is what you want. I am not trying to get away with sin. I am trying to get free from stuff that keeps me from being happy, fascinated and alive.

### **WINNING IS TO FINISH OUR LIVES WITH COMPLETE OBEDIENCE**

Great and a glorious future in feeling the Word—this is what I want. I want my mundane, routine, every day life to be filled with meaning because in the humaneness of life I say yes to those eight beatitudes from the heart, and it’s as if the Lord says, “Oh, I am putting it in My book now. That afternoon is now powerful in My sight.” What a way to live. I hate boredom. That is why I am going hard after this thing. I do not want to be dull, dead, or bored. I want to be alive and relevant. I want to be really great.

Unashamedly, I want to be great. I want to be rich and great in a really big house really close to the Lord in the Millennium. I just want it on the other side. I really do.

Okay. Some of the young adults took the tape and they cut this thing out a couple of years ago. And they said that I want to be rich, great, and have a really big house. They did not add the rest of it. Well, bless their little hearts. No. I talked to the guy: he says, “Man. You need to get a bigger this, or that.”

I say, “Oh, I will. I promise you, I will.”

He says, “Oh. You got one.”

I say, “Oh. It is a little time delayed. I promise you, I am not into big houses. I promise you I am. I am not worried about waiting a little bit. I am just not worried about waiting because I want the real one forever and forever.”

### **SUCCESS IS LIVING GREAT BEFORE GOD**

That is my point: Success is getting the testimony. Read Hebrews 11:5: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death . . . before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Getting the testimony that we “pleased God” is awesome. It is not just a moment on our deathbed, when the guy is so sick, beaten up, and bruised that he cannot do anything sinful besides be mad. So finally he just decides to be happy, so he made it. No. That is not what I am talking about. I am not talking about on the last day of your life, you decide that you want to settle the issues.

I want to live in a way where the Lord looks down, and though it is never the absolute sense of perfect obedience, the Lord says, “OK, your time, your money, your attitude, your speech”—you know, go down the issues—“you have got a history, Mike. You have got a history. You have been trying to obey Me, and you have a history in it.” That is the testimony Enoch got. He received the testimony while he was still on the earth. Now that is really jazzy, if you can get it on this side. I will take it on the other side. I will take it here if I can get it. But a couple of guys got it on this side. It is not the testimony that they were doing well for a month. It is the testimony they had a real history.

### **“BRIDLING OUR SPEECH”**

All of them had their mistakes. Beloved, do not imagine any of them had perfection in the absolute sense; but when they fell, they declared war, they got back into it, they pushed delete, they had confidence before God, and they declared war. Beloved, that declaring of war counts as a significant part of victory even before the breakthrough comes down the road. The decision to call it sin and war is a substantial part of the victory. The victory does not start when your tongue is perfectly bridled.

The victory is already working when you have left the conversation, and you say to God, “That was wrong that I said that. That was wrong that I said that.” The reason that I am mentioning the tongue is because this is the last frontier in everyone’s life—speech. It is what James says. That is the final one. You get the tongue under the Holy Spirit’s leadership; every area of your life will then come under the order of the Holy Spirit. The issue of complaining and the issue of slandering, those are the two that just absolutely do not want to leave. The Lord wants us to bring our whole inner man under the leadership of Holy Spirit. I want this testimony.

### **THREE LIFE FOCUSES AS SEEN IN SCRIPTURE**

We have three dimensions in our calling in God: internal, external, and eternal. I have other times where I develop it more extensively than this, so this is a summary for those who have really stopped paying attention to the way we have talked about this in the past.

We have an internal part of our calling, an external part of our calling, and an eternal part of our calling. Internal, external and eternal: our primary calling in this age is internal. They will tell us our primary calling is external. Beloved, the most important thing about my life is not how many people are coming to the conference, or how many people are seeing it on TV. The Lord is not going to talk to me about the size of meetings. He is going to talk to me about the size of my heart as defined by the eight beatitudes.

### **THE BEATITUDES ARE WHAT GOD IS GOING TO JUDGE US ON**

Purity, poverty of spirit, loving righteousness, loving mercy, being a peace maker, mourning over the issues where there is a gap between what I am committed to, and what I am walking out: those eight things are what God will judge us for. Our primary calling is the internal calling to be a disciple of Jesus without regard to money or honor, without regard to the breakthrough.

Now I like the breakthrough. I am a breakthrough guy. I love the breakthrough. I like it now; I want it later. I am not going to give up my primary calling because the breakthrough is delayed, or because the breakthrough does not look like what I wanted it too. I am not going to give away my calling because the breakthrough is delayed, or it looks different. I want it big and I want it now, but I am not going to give up my calling if it does not happen. So far it has not happened, so I am staying with my calling.

### **OUR PRIMARY CALLING IS INTERNAL**

My primary calling is internal. This is a paradigm shift. I want to tell these 20,000 young people this week about this. What is going on right now in our nation is that the Body of Christ is trying to activate the couch potatoes in the Body of Christ.

There are millions of Christians who are hooked on entertainment and recreation. They go to church; they will go on their weekly service, throw a little bit of money in here or there, go to a conference once a year. Not that going to a conference is the point. My point is that they kind of think of themselves as being the embodiment of what the title of the conference is. They say, “I went to that one conference. That ought to validate something.” Most of the Body of Christ, from my point of view, are couch potatoes. They live for comfort. They live for pleasure, to be stimulated in their senses. They claim forgiveness all the time, and they get so that the great thrust in the Body of Christ is to get the couch potato to turn the TV off and go do something. That is a huge victory—that they get connected to impact—but, beloved, let me tell you something: there is something bigger than impact. It is the development of your heart.

So we are going to get a whole bunch of people. The folks that are coming this week are going for impact. That is how we can get them. I want to take them to the next rung of the ladder and talk to them about how their primary calling is internal.

### **OUR PRIMARY CALLING IS AN INTERNAL CALLING AS A DISCIPLE**

Now, do not fear: when a person really gets connected to be a disciple of Jesus, to love God, and love people, they will be far more effective in their impact, and far more effective in the other areas in the long term of life, if they have really touched Jesus. You cannot get into the Sermon on the Mount and disconnect from impact. When impact is your idol, your heart will get so bruised and so wounded if that is your primary calling of life.

I mean, there are a million believers who are all in the hospital emotionally getting patched up from the last season, and it is because their impact wounded them—because it did not happen very much. It’s as if the Lord says, “No. I called you to be a disciple of Me. What are you doing? I called you to grow in the eight beatitudes. I did not tell you how big your ministry would be. How come you are not doing the eight beatitudes? Why are you not doing this?”

This is where your real impact is going to come. Beloved, I am really into impact, but if we get the people in right order, we will get far greater impact for decades. We really will. When we get disciples of Jesus, rather than just conference attendees who will do what I call “saber rattling.” I

do want people who say, “I want to follow through on Sermon on the Mount Christianity for millions of people standing true to the end.”

That is what the Lord is pleased with. Well, we have our internal, external calling, and I love it. I have an assignment. I have various levels of my assignment. Part of my assignment is at IHOP–KC. Part of my assignment is in TheCall, GOD TV, in my neighborhood, and in my family. I have assignment in different levels of ministry. I love my assignment. It is our function in the marketplace and in the family.

Our assignment is not our department on the church org chart. Our ministry assignment is far more than what we do at the church org chart where we say, “I am over this department.” Beloved, at the most, that is 20 percent of what you do at the end of the day.

I have an assignment. I’ve got a big place on the IHOP–KC org chart. I mean, “Mike Bickle—he is over this and this.” But you know what? Eighty percent of my life has no direct correlation to that assignment of the org chart. Eighty percent of my ministry is talking to some guy one-on-one on the way, coming or going to something, talking at a meeting, or talking to a family member.

Very little of my ministry is actually standing in front of people doing this. This is a couple hours a week. I have one hundred sixty-eight hours to work with. I do this a couple hours a week. What about the other one hundred sixty-seven hours, you know? Most of my ministry is not standing in front of a group of people. It is not standing in front of a team of leaders. That happens three, four, five, six times a week, but I have a lot more hours between there and there.

### **OUR TEMPORAL EXTERNAL CALLING IS OUR POSITION OR FUNCTION**

I care about my external calling. But, I care about my eternal, and a lot of folks let go of the internal. They only go for their external now. That is a huge mistake, huge mistake. At the end of the day, they get taken out. They get bruised so badly in the disappointment. If number two is all that you are focused on—that you are primarily focused on—you will get bruised severely time and time again at the heart level.

### **THREE LIFE FOCUSES: HEART OBEDIENCE, MINISTRY, AND BLESSED LIFE**

Three focuses: I have got life focuses. I want to put the words *prosperity* and *favor* in focus; there are three dimensions of prosperity that are in the Bible. There are in-the-heart prosperity—heart obedience. There is the ministry prosperity, or ministry impact. And there are the blessed circumstances. Most believers I know are focused on the blessed circumstances. We get a bunch of them off the couch, and they get focused on ministry impact. Beloved, I want the anointing of the Spirit to love God with all of my heart. I want a ministry impact.

I want blessed circumstances, but I am not willing to reverse the order of these three things. Again, as a shepherd, I am thinking of these 20,000 young people and the folks on the television watching. Most of the fiery people in the kingdom of God are focused on blessed circumstances:

how to get more now, money and honor, friends or how to have a bigger crowd. They will rebook still; go to conferences to get more money or a bigger crowd.

The Lord essentially says, “I give more money. I give bigger crowds, but I really want you to have a bigger heart.”

“I do not want to do that. I want to figure out how to get more money.” That is where most of the Body of Christ lives. How to make a bigger house, a bigger car, a bigger slush fund to be able to come and go in the way they want, so they do not have to be dependent on anything. That is not in itself bad, but let me tell you this: Blessed circumstances are not going to get us anywhere when we stand before the Lord. I want blessed circumstances, I really do. I want it in this age. I want it a lot more in the age to come, but I want to lock into heart obedience.

### **HEART OBEDIENCE: A SECRET HISTORY IN AGREEMENT WITH HOLY SPIRIT**

This is the prosperity movement that I am talking about. So much of the Body of Christ is locked into just money and honor, or how to get seven steps; they will go to any seminar to get money and honor. It is like a small percent will go for ministry impact. I mean, we get them off the couch, turn the remote controls off, get them out of their vacation spirit, and get them into the work of the kingdom. But then it’s as if the Lord says, “I have more for them than that. I would actually like them to encounter Me in truth, in holiness, in purity, in mercy, with a poverty-stricken spirit, with mourning over their failures.”

I do not mean a mourning where we go into a morbid introspection. I am talking about how we are so committed to walking in the light; then, when the Lord shows us we have come up short, our heart is stung because we want the fullness of what God will give the human spirit in this age.

### **OUR PRIMARY CALLINGS IS A LIFE OF COMPLETE OBEDIENCE**

Roman numeral IV. Let’s look at this just the last moment or two here. James 1:2-5: “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask . . . and it will be given to him.” What James 1:3 is talking about is that the testing of your faith produces patience. This is not talking about the patience of somebody cutting you off in the traffic flow.

The word is *perseverance*, or Romans 5:3 calls it “proven character.” Character that is proven: that is what patience is—proven character. It means we will make the right decision over and over again facing that pressure. That is proven character. Here is why we want proven character because James 1:4, when proven character has its work—say the word impact—when it has its impact in your life, when it has its perfect work, its mature impact, then you will be perfect and complete lacking nothing.

**“TO PERFECT WHAT IS LACKING IN YOUR FAITH”**

You will be walking in your life vision to be complete and perfect in your obedience. That is what this is talking about: lacking nothing. Lacking nothing means there is no area that you are consciously continually resisting the Holy Spirit’s leadership.

That is what lacking nothing means. The goal of my life from God’s point of view in your life, He gives us seventy years on the earth to whatever. He says, “I am going to give you seventy years to run a race.” Here is the main thing I want to know from you after you decide to be a believer. Were you complete in obedience, more than just on your deathbed? Did you have a history developed of complete obedience, mature obedience? Not absolutely complete. We are talking the relative sense. So when I do badly, when you do badly, the Lord essentially says, “OK, you have got time. I am going to give you a hundred more chances to make a different decision in that same pressure. I am going to give it to you because I care. I want to give you the testimony before you die you are complete and lack nothing in obedience. It is critical that you get it. You will really want it before you die.”

This thing is not about getting saved as though by fire. The goal—the whole point after we are born again is to get this testimony. So we blow it. It’s as if He says, “OK. I am a God of mercy. I love you so much. I am going to give you a hundred more chances, same pressure. It might look a little different, so let’s go the other way.”

So we say, “Yes.”

The Lord says, “I do not want it to be a momentary or sentimental yes. I want it to be a yes that comes from a quality decision. Here is what I am going to do. I am going to give you the same choice. I want you to say yes.”

We respond, “Lord, I already said yes once. Let this one go. OK. Is this pass or fail? Just put it on pass. Do not bring it up again.”

The Lord says, “No. I want you in the same circumstance. Maybe it will look a little bit differently. I want proven character. I want you to say yes over and over because I want it to be the real yes. When you failed, you said it is not the real me. OK, good. But when you obeyed, is it the real you?”

“Well, yes,” we respond.

The Lord might say, “Well, good. Then when you face it again, you will make the same choice again. See, Adam and Eve in the garden were innocent. They were not mature in righteousness. They were innocent. They had not had choices. God gave them a choice because He wanted them to choose. You cannot have proven character until you have chosen the right thing over and over again.” He gives us decades to do it. Any wrong thing we can rectify, but any right thing will be proven over and over again. The Lord says, “The sum total is measured. Are you complete and mature in your faith at the end? That is the whole point of seventy years on the

earth. That is the primary point. Lacking nothing, there are no blind spots. There is no area that escaped your radar. You lack nothing. You understand all the areas I was speaking to you; I made it clear.”

### **IF YOU LACK WISDOM, ASK**

So then James is quoting his big brother, Jesus. He is quoting Matthew 5:48 right here. He is directly quoting the Sermon on the Mount, the high point of the Sermon on the Mount. I mean, the whole book of James gives the high point of the Sermon on the Mount, which is to be perfect.

James begins the entire book at the high point, and then he breaks it down. I think he looked up and said, “Jesus, do You like that?” and He said, “Good job, little brother. You really unpacked that well.”

That is what the book of James really is about. It is the unpacking of the Sermon on the Mount from a different point of view. So then the guy says, “Oh, man. How do I know?”

It’s as if James says, “I am glad you asked.” James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask . . . and it will be given to him.” Ask God for discernment. See this verse: if you ask for wisdom—it is OK to use this verse for domestic decisions. It is not talking about, should you move from one city to another? Should you marry this one? Should you go to that university? Should you? That is not what he is talking about in this context at all. Though that you could use the verse for that, and there are plenty of verses for that.

He is talking about if you lack wisdom, if you are not sure about the blind spots in your life, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. He will tell you where in your speech, in your time, in your money, in your eyes, or in your physical appetites. He will tell you where you are stepping across the line, if you ask Him. See, beloved, one of the beautiful things about the prayer room is we come and we worship. We say, “I love You. I love You. I love You.” In the prayer room we contend, “Lord, break in, break in, break in. Change cities and nations.”

In the prayer room, you know what we also do? Psalm 139:23: David said, “Search me.” It is as if David was asking God, “Tell me about the blind spots. Tell me.” David was doing James 1:5 here asking for wisdom. Tell me about the blind spots. So in the prayer room we say, “I love You.” In the prayer room, we get revelation, “Oh, Jesus, You are fascinating. I love You.” In the prayer room, we get renewed in our confidence that He gave us mercy.

In the prayer room, we could change cities, but beloved in the prayer room, we could wait on Him for Him to give us this wisdom. Do you actually ask for this wisdom, in James 1:5, in context for the areas that are lacking in your full obedience? Because if all you have is the voice of the people around you, I am telling you the people around you will so flood you with affirmation of being carnal and compromising because it makes them feel better if you do it their way. They will give you Bible verses. They will prophecy. They will do anything in the world to keep you happy at a lower standard, so you do not trouble them. “So, Lord,” James 1:5

(paraphrased): “Is there anything?” Psalm 139 (paraphrased): “Search me, search me, Lord; is there anything? Is there any issue? Search me, Lord.” There are a number of verses in the Psalms.

### **PAUL PRAYED TO BE COMPLETELY RESPONSIVE TO HOLY SPIRIT**

The next verse Paul prayed it for the Church. I will not break this down; you can see it for yourself. 1 Thessalonians 3:10-13: “Praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith . . . May the Lord make you increase and abound in love . . . so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus.” Paul prayed exceedingly that he would be able to come to them and perfect what is lacking. He wanted to go there and show them the areas in their faith were lacking.

The point to Paul was to get the people to end the race without lacking anything, perfect in their obedience, in their responsiveness. You can put the word *responsive* if you want. The next verse, the final verse is the great prayer.

### **“TO COUNT YOU WORTHY OF THE CALLING”**

Now, notice in both of these Thessalonians verses he is praying “exceedingly” in 1 Thessalonians 3. He is praying “always” in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12: “We also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasures of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that that name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him.” It is the same prayer. In the 2 Thessalonians 1 prayer, Paul is praying always that the grace of God would strengthen them, that they would be found faithful. They would have follow through. That is what it means to be counted worthy. He is not talking about earning anything. They would live in follow-through, so that they would have their assignment in the age to come secured. This is a prayer about their assignment in the age they lived in as well, but in the age to come because the fullness of their calling does not happen until later.

It is as if Paul said, “Guys, if you walk worthy”—meaning, if you walk in substantial agreement with God’s heart—“if you will walk substantially in agreement, it is this whole issue of pursuing that which is lacking. If you will do this, you will have all the things related to your calling.” You know what guys are doing to try and get their calling? They are putting all their time on networking and having clever presentations.

We need to put our time into connecting and having the magnet of the Spirit draw things into their proper place in this age, and then secure them for the age to come. I believe in a right presentation. I believe in a little bit of networking. I do it. I believe in it. I think it is right. I think it is of the kingdom, but guys get anxious about their functions, and they overdo presentation. They will do anything so they can do it better on the stage. The lights, the colors, the sounds, the stories—anything, just so they can do it better on the stage. They do anything so they get more people listening to them. It’s as if the Lord says, “How about Me? I am listening to you. How about you and Me? I will drop a divine magnet in your midst, if you will do it My way, if you are found faithful.” That is what it means to be counted worthy.

My point is this: this is the issue for our life. We need to have a clear, focused vision as to what we are doing in our seventy years on the earth. I want to be a disciple of the Lord by internal calling. I want my external and my eternal. They will take care of themselves. Let's stand.

**MINISTRY TIME**

“Lord, here we are. Lord, I want to belong to You.” I want the Holy Spirit to search us. I am not talking about the cost of discipleship. I am talking about the glory of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I am talking about having a happy spirit.

“Lord, we say to You that we are signing up for these eight beatitudes. We are signing up again.” Beloved, I have to sign up for these things every week, or two, or three, whatever. I have to resign up. I have to search them out.

I do not want you to tell me I am doing well. I mean I appreciate it actually, but I have got to know that I am doing these eight things. I have got to know that when you are not looking, I am doing those eight things.

Amen.