

Religion or Grace?

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading today comes from the book of Micah and the gospel of Luke. Please follow along in your bulletin. Know, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you, to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and there was a woman who, for 18 years, had a sickness caused by a spirit, and she was bent double and could not straighten up at all.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your sickness. And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God.

But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, There are six days in which work should be done, so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath.

But the Lord answered him and said, You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him?

[1 : 24] And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for 18 long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?

As he said this, all his opponents were being humiliated, and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by him.

So he was saying, What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.

And again he said, To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour, until it was all leavened.

This is God's word. How's everybody doing?

[2 : 36] After that, it was great. Great worship time. It's going to be a scared thing to situate here. Wow. Wow. That's one of those questions you hear and you sing and you wonder if you can sing it honestly, right?

Well, when we started out this church, one of our desires was, and we knew God was calling us to plant a church, but we knew also that he was kind of calling us to plant a community and to plant a church family.

And so as we started thinking about what is a family supposed to look like? What do we want a family to be like? And how do we value family in our lives?

One of the things we realized really quickly is we wanted a family to be authentic and real and not have to wear a mask when they come in here, but they can just be who they are and not have to feel like, okay, I need to pretend a certain way or act a certain way.

And so that was one of the huge things we pray about. We continue to pray about all the time is realness and authenticity and just the freedom to be who we are. One of the other things we prayed about was we wanted an atmosphere where people felt free to just ask questions.

[3 : 58] If you're around our dinner table at night and we talk about highlights and lowlights and why things happen, our kids ask a lot of questions. We actually have a lot of questions that I can't answer.

We just, I don't know why that happened. And we talk about things. And when we try to incorporate that into the church too, that every so often when we come to a topic or a sermon that is very intense or it's very difficult to preach or to hear, we feel like, okay, let's stop and talk about that for a second.

What do you guys hear when you hear these words said? What is it in your heart? Does that resonate well with your soul or do you go, oh, I just can't stand that?

And so we wanted to be able to do that. The last couple weeks I felt like we talked about some very hard topics. Two weeks ago we talked about Jesus coming again and we talked about people worshiping in the temple and Pilate killing them all at their most vulnerable and holy point.

We talked about a tower falling over on people and is killing them without a warning. And what does that look like in our life? And Jesus basically said in that passage that the question isn't when I come back but the question is what you're gonna look like and what are you gonna be doing when I come back?

[5 : 18] How's your life gonna be lived? You know, we talked about that God is this great venture capitalist and he's giving each one of us gifts and talents and money.

And at the end when he comes back in that passage it says he's gonna look at everything he's given us and we're gonna be judged by those things. How do we use those things? Did we make a good return on his investment in our life or did we just waste those things and squander those things?

And so I thought that was an incredibly hard and difficult passage to hear because it's very convicting. It makes you ask questions. Last week we talked about Luke 13 and I'm just looking at the passage here and we talked about just this idea of just again Pilate killing people and sacrifices and things happening in people's lives and realizing that just because things are going well doesn't necessarily mean that our relationship with God is good.

I think that was one of the things that hit me as I read through those things because often we think that way but the passage was really clear that Christ is this vine dresser and he comes in and we're the tree and he's breaking all these things away from our roots that prevent us from growing, from doing fruit, becoming more like what he wants us to be like.

Actually the passage says that Christ, Jesus, the vine dresser right now in your life that he's preventing us from getting what we deserve. He's trying to do everything he can so that we are wooed to him.

[6 : 56] We see how beautiful he is and we worship him and we love him. We talk the idea about repent and what that means and often we talk about repentance as a self-centered repentance. We said scripture talks about being a God-centered repentance.

We talked a lot again about the vine keeper keeping us away from what we deserved and we said over and over that our circumstances are not a reflection of our relationship with God.

This week I've got all these questions. We were talking to people. One guy came to me. He goes, okay, I've been told my whole life that if my life is going well, that I'm healthy, that if my business is doing well, that if my marriage is doing good, if my kids get into the right schools, if I'm doing all those things, that just basically says that I'm doing well with God and now you're telling me that might not be true and I said, I'm not telling you it.

The Bible's telling you it. It might not necessarily be true. It might be that God loves you so much that he's allowing those things to happen in your life so that you'll see how beautiful and wonderful he is and that you'll come to him.

That's what Romans says and that's what the whole parable of the vine dresser is. It's about him making a way so that we can see him and sometimes he uses hard things and sometimes he uses amazingly good things.

[8 : 24] But the issue is that God is always wooing us. He's always there and he's always in our life. Another person came up and they asked the question, why now I feel really anxious?

I mean, I don't know if I'm doing what God wants me to do. After listening to these talks, I've been just kind of doing my own thing. I don't know if I'm really obeying God. I don't know if I'm doing things.

I feel really uncomfortable now. And I said, that's good. Because the Christian life is meant to be lived with some bit of uncomfortability.

The things you hear from God's word don't bother you sometimes and bother you intensely. It might mean that you're not really struggling with what it means to walk with God. I said, I feel uncomfortable sometimes.

I wonder if I'm using the resources that God gave me well. Am I using the talents? Am I trusting him? Knowing that ultimately all growth and gift and all these things come from him. I said to him, hey, just relax.

[9 : 28] Because I think sometimes the Christian life is this slow, steady pace. and the questions we ask ourselves are, are we loving people well?

Are we loving God well? Are we using our gifts and our talents to his glory? Or are we repenting of our sins and things that, you know, Luther says our heart is this idol factory that keeps producing these idols that we grab onto in the passage we're reading today and throughout scripture says it's not just a one-time repentance coming to God, but we continually repent as we see how beautiful and wonderful he is and our need for him.

It's good to feel anxious sometimes and you ask those questions, how am I doing? What's going on? Those are the questions I got that I've addressed. Is there, if you've been here for the last two weeks, is there a question that you've been thinking about that you felt like was, I'm putting the sound guys on the spot, but as you look at the passages, was there something that stuck out in you that you want to ask?

I don't know if we'll have the answer, but I'm sure there's people in here that have a ton of, I thought Mary, just take one question in these passages of Jesus coming again and are we the steward? Do we have our lights lit? Are we obeying for the master and in the towers? Were there any other questions that stuck out in that? Okay, so for some of you, this is like the first time you've seen this and this is really weird even that he's walking around in front of everybody but we want to do that as a family and just think about that and if you have questions, please ask them.

[11 : 14] That's why we want you to be in community groups because community groups go over these studies again and they'll give you a chance to ask the questions maybe in a less threatening way than church here but I have a lot of questions.

Okay, if you don't have any questions, just think about it. Go back and read the passages but we want to answer questions with people especially when we think that man, I have that same question and that really bothers me too.

Okay, we're in Luke 13 verses 10 through 21. Jesus is, this is the last time he's going to be teaching in a synagogue. He's teaching in a synagogue and he does a miracle and it's the last miracle he's going to do.

From this point on he's heading towards Jerusalem. He's been teaching and doing things for three years and it says in here that he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

This is actually a, we call it a mirror miracle. A mirror like you see your face miracle. This is the bookend to the first miracle that Jesus did in Luke 4.18.

[12 : 26] In Luke 4.18, Jesus comes into the synagogue and he teaches. Remember he gets up Isaiah and he reads it. He reads it, the spirit of the Lord God is upon me. He's called me to proclaim freedom from the captives to release the bondage of people.

And he does this miracle and remember what happens after he does that? He sits down and he says, this prophecy's been fulfilled in your day and the religious guys go, what? You're saying that you're the Messiah.

You're saying that you're God. And they want to take him and they want to throw him off a hill. So a mirror miracle is something that's done later on, almost the exact same miracle and they want to show it to you and see has the people's reaction changed?

Have people thought differently about Jesus? Or are their reactions the same? And so he's in the synagogue and he's teaching. In verse 10, he was teaching in one of the synagogues that he would have been invited in and we're told that it was in Capernaum.

Now a synagogue is just a church, a house church, okay? It's a Jewish house church. In 586 BC, the Babylonian Empire came in and they decimated Israel.

[13 : 34] They destroyed Jerusalem. They destroyed the first temple and they took everyone in Jerusalem away to Babylon. And when they got to Babylon, well they didn't have a place to sacrifice. They couldn't sacrifice because they were under oppression.

But they needed a place to worship and so they invented these things called synagogues. So it's not in the Bible, it's not in the Old Testament, there's no place in it, but they started to gather and worship there. So Jesus is walking through Capernaum, his hometown, and there would have been at least 40 synagogues there.

We don't know how many or which one he was in. And he was invited by the teacher and he comes in to teach. Verse 11, it says that there was a woman who for 18 years had a sickness caused by a spirit and that she was bent double and could not straighten up.

So you got this here, so Jesus is teaching in a synagogue. In a synagogue, he would have been up in the front, the entrance is in the back, there would have been men over here and women over here and if it was a huge synagogue, they would have been really, really dispersed and put apart because women didn't worship with men, that was not a good thing.

And so he's in there teaching and it says that this lady comes in and I'm gonna go through verse by verse because I think this is a very important passage. She comes in and for 18 years she's had a sickness and verse 16, we're told that the devil comes into her life, demonic possession, something she did in her life.

[14:56] It doesn't say she's possessed now. 18 years ago she was doing something and she opened herself up to some kind of bad influence or demonic influence. We don't know what happened but this demon came in, the devil came in and it bound her.

The Greek word is basically bent and the idea is of like a carpenter's square just like this. Okay? So for 18 years this lady is like this.

She can't look up, she can't do anything, she can't engage, she's walking like this. I debated whether I should do this. Everybody stand up.

Come on, you're not that old. Greg's not that old. Mark, you're not that old. Okay, so from the waist down, this is a test of dexterity and limber.

I have a terrible back so as in straight, you know. So you just bend over like this. Face down. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

[16:11] Okay, back up. Now, you can sit back down. Now, I tried that last night for five and a half minutes and my back started going out on me. But this, and you just did it for ten seconds.

But this lady was like that for almost 20 years. Can you imagine walking around? She's basically in a false or forced position of humility.

And for 18 years, she walks around like that and we're told that as Jesus is preaching, she is in there. I don't know if you can imagine that. To me, as I've been trying to think about that, I think it's amazing that she's even in the temple or in the synagogue.

Because on a couple accounts, one account is this. She's a woman. She's crippled. Everybody in that culture would have thought she's a sinner. So she's in a place where everybody sees her and they look at her with disdain and disgust and they don't want to be near her whatsoever.

I mean, she has all the strikes going against her. She's an outsider, but still, she's there. Another thing to me that's amazing when I think about this is that she's in amazing pain and discomfort.

[17:38] I mean, it would have been incredible and still, she comes to church. We're not told that she comes to church because she knows Jesus is there because you see her actions. She doesn't do that.

I mean, the Greek basically says she comes to the synagogue every Sabbath. Now, sometimes we don't want to come to church because we have a headache or I've had a really hard week or it's uncomfortable or I really need a break, but this woman has the best excuse ever not to come to church.

It's a cultural one. It's an inconvenient one. She's in incredible pain. She's a woman. She's cursed. Everybody would have looked at her and thought, she's forsaken.

Why are you here? And possibly, you just wonder, why is she here? Because in the service, all she's doing as they stand up is sits like this and all she looks at is the dirt in people's feet.

But she comes to worship on the Sabbath. Verse 12, we're told that Jesus saw her. The Greek there is he noticed her. He called her over and he said to her, woman, you are free.

[19:07] Now, I don't know if you understand what happened here, but no one would have ever done that. She's been walking to church for 18 years and no one has noticed her.

I think about that sometimes when I come to church. I wonder if there are people in here who come in Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and no one notices them.

No one talks to them. No one cares. Maybe you're sitting by one of those people. Maybe you are one of those people, but she's there and she's present and she's worshipping and Jesus notices her. He calls her out. He separates her from everybody else. It's probably the first time in her life she's ever been noticed. He calls her out and the words are very intentional.

He notices her. He calls to her. He comes to her. He touches her. He heals her. All action words. Now, that would have never happened in her life and remember, she's not seeking Jesus.

[20 : 23] She didn't come say, Jesus, please save me. I need help. She didn't say, oh, I heard the Messiah is coming today. I want to come get healed. I mean, there's nothing in her life that says she's came to draw him out.

She's never come to call him out. She's never getting attention from him. She's basically just come there and Jesus looks at her and says, you're free. In Greek, the word actually means loosed. It actually means whatever is holding you right now, permanently and forever, it's gone. verse 13, he laid his hands on her and in the Greek, it's almost like he gave her a bear hug and he lifted her up with his hands and immediately she became erect again and she began glorifying the Lord and yelling out, look at what's happened to me, look at what's happened to me, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? 18 years and a miracle happens? Can you imagine what that would have been like if that was you?

For 18 years, you're walking like this, you come to church not expecting anything and all of a sudden Jesus notices you and he comes to you and he releases you from what's holding on to you.

[21 : 41] He doesn't just release you, he says you're permanently and forever free of that bondage and that thing has taken you away forever. She rejoices and praises the Lord.

Now I have a lot of questions here, I mean this passage is full of questions. The first question is this, I wonder what would have happened to her that day if she decided to skip church.

I wonder what she would have done and what would have happened to her if she would just follow the thing that I probably would have done and just decided to skip church. Verse 14, but the synagogue official, the ruler of the synagogue became indignant.

It basically says that he was incest, he was incredibly intense, he anger, steam coming out of his head and he says, but Jesus had healed on the Sabbath and he began saying to the crowd in response, so he's not even looking at Jesus, he yells out to the crowd, there are six days in which work should be done so come during those and get healed but don't come on the Sabbath.

I mean, it's crazy. You know what the Sabbath is? It began in Genesis when God created day one, day two, day three, day four, day five, day six, and then in Genesis one and two we're told that God gives a rest and it says when he gives a rest all of creation looks at him and is in wonder and awe of the great things that he's done.

[23 : 20] The Sabbath was meant to focus on God, the Sabbath was meant to worship God, the Sabbath is meant to be in God's presence but in Jesus' day the leaders had changed it and the Sabbath became more about myself the Sabbath became more about a self-focus it became more about am I being good?

Am I doing all the right things? Am I keeping the law? How am I doing? And the leaders of the church changed the focus of the Sabbath off of God and on to men.

Do we do that sometimes? Do we walk into church sometimes and we wonder okay what's going on here? What do they have to offer me?

I know I'm talking to myself. What's the service going to be like and who's singing and who's doing worship and who's leading the sermon? Am I going to get anything off of this?

Or am I going to walk out and kind of go I don't know it's okay. Presentation humor but I really didn't feel that moved. Music okay Katie's pretty good.

[24 : 46] The passage says that in Jesus' day everybody who walked into the synagogue focused on themselves instead of God. And so you can imagine why it would be easy to say hey I don't want to go to church today.

hey it's not convenient for me to go to church today I just have a bad headache. Hey I have other things to need to do and I just don't really want to focus today.

I deserve a rest today. These are all things I've said to myself. I mean can you imagine that? None of us in here would ever say to our kids you know you've studied so hard this week and you knew that Friday was a final exam or a test you've studied so hard don't go to school on Friday take Friday off.

We would never say that. We would never be in our work and working really hard and knowing that our boss or the guy above us is coming in on Friday to do something and you would never say you know I've worked so hard this week and I've had such a great time and brought in all these clients but you know I need to take a rest and I'm sorry boss but I can't see that.

But we would never do that. But people did that in Jesus' day. And the leader that's a scary thing to me the leader in this passage he's actually yelling out things that are preventing people from coming to God.

[26 : 13] He's saying don't come to God today. Don't expect God to do something in your life today because we don't want to do work because if it's going to be work you need to come another day and I wonder how many days that lady came.

Because the passage seems to indicate that she came for 18 years every Sabbath and no one ever noticed her and no one ever talked to her and she never met healing or new life.

Well the passage says that everybody's out of control the leaders are out of control they're worried about getting people following Jesus instead of themselves and I think as I read this passage I wonder if the leaders are also thinking something like this they're angry because they look at that woman and they realize she doesn't deserve it.

She's a sinner. She's broken it's obvious that she doesn't deserve it it's obvious that God has cursed her how come God would do that? God would never bless somebody who's broken and bent over God only blesses the people like us who do everything right.

God would never bless that person he could never bless that person only person who deserves blessing is me because I do all the rules and I do everything right.

[27 : 37] I think the leaders were worried about losing control because Jesus was collapsing their paradigm of thought and he was saying it's not about you but it's about God and what God is doing in our life.

Verses 16 and 17 15 and 16 Jesus talks to them and he says you hypocrites in Greek the word actually means second face it means actor it means pretender that actors got up on stage and they just put a mask on you people who wear masks doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water and this woman a daughter of Abraham as she is whom Satan has bound has bent over for 18 years should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day.

You hypocrites he's saying he's saying you take care of your animals there are about 45 laws in the Mishnah the oral tradition of the rabbis that say you should take your animals to water on the Sabbath and how to do that and Jesus is going after them and he's saying you take care of your animals you take care of your property you take care of your stuff you take care of your resources you take care of your wealth but you don't want to take care of the people around you.

As long as there's a self-interest as long as it's about God blessing you you want to do it but if it's about God blessing other people you get angry and the word here he uses again is released verse 16 it's the same word that he uses when he talks about being released in healing her and says your sins are forgiven stand up I've released you you see what Jesus is saying here I mean he's saying to the people don't be so consumed on ritual in tradition that you lose compassion in people he's saying this is the day the Sabbath is the day to remember God the Sabbath is the day to celebrate God's goodness the Sabbath is the day to remember God's grace Jesus is saying don't focus on the outward but focus on your heart don't miss worshiping God because you're so worried about what you dress like when you come to church don't worship missing God because things aren't going as planned and the schedules are behind you've come to meet God

Jesus says to them don't lose sight of people while you're doing church basically when you walk to church or when you walk to the synagogue don't lose sight of the people that you pass because all of these people are the reason that Christ came Jesus says don't forget about worship don't forget about serving others he talks over and over and he says be careful because religion exalts man that if you come to church and you say I've been here I've done all these things I've done all these crossed all my T's I've gone through all the programs Jesus is saying be careful because that glorifies man the focus is on yourself don't think that you're doing well just because you keep all the rules he says religion doesn't change your heart only Jesus changes your heart only grace changes your heart

[31 : 28] Jesus is telling them over and over that just because you modify your behavior just because you come and you do these certain things and you go through these rituals just because you're taking part in everything that the synagogue is asking you to do it doesn't bring true life change you can't change your heart by modifying your behavior and he's warning everybody in the synagogue to realize that unless Jesus shows up unless the gospel is in our life unless we understand grace we're just like the Pharisee and we miss God verse 17 he goes on and he said

this and all his opponents were being humiliated the Greek word basically means publicly and fully they're put to shame and the entire crowd is having a party as they focus on all the amazing and great things that God has done he goes on in verse 18 to 21 he goes you want to know what the kingdom of God is like you want to know what it looks like when God moves in people's lives you want to know what it looks like when God moves in

Hong Kong you want to know what it looks like when God moves at Bel Air you want to know what it looks like when God moves wherever he's moving this is what it looks like and he was saying that the kingdom of God is like this and to what shall I compare it it's like a mustard seed and a man took it and he threw it on a garden and it grew and it became this huge tree so big that all the birds of the air nestled in its branches and again he said what shall I compare to the kingdom of God it's like leaven it's like this little piece of leaven that when you stick it into this piece of dough three pecks is about 50 pounds the kingdom of God the gospel the message is it's like this little piece of leaven and when you're out there sharing it with people you stick it in their life and sometimes you feel like nothing's happened but what happens when you stick that little piece of leaven in that 50 pounds of dough over a period of time that dough changes and it becomes useful and fermented and Jesus says this is what God's word is like this is what the kingdom is like you might be faithful you might be doing all these things you might feel like nothing's happening anywhere but know this that when the gospel goes out and then when it's sowed wherever you do it wherever you're faithfully sharing that is at work and it's going to start out small and it's going to start out inside of you and it's going to work through you and change everything that you're about that's what the kingdom of God is like this passage to me is full of truths it's full of facts it's full of lessons and it's full of questions we see in it that God tells us about his kingdom and how he works we see in it

Jesus Christ his power his authority he continues to cast out demons but more importantly we see that he has compassion on people that he notices people and that he cares for them we see we see in this passage that there's a big difference between religion and understanding grace just because we come to the synagogue and do all the right things doesn't necessarily mean that we know God but what sticks out to me the most in this passage is the story that Jesus tells because he tells this story a very powerful story of two people and in Jesus' culture whenever he told a story or whenever he did a comparison or whenever he did a parable he was expecting you to do something and what he was expecting you to do is which person are you well none of us are Jesus so it only leaves two of us it leaves the broken woman and the

Pharisee and Jesus would have been asking all his audience as he heard this message they would have been called to a point of decision they would have been called to ask a question of themselves and the question of themselves would have been who am I most like in this story if I had to put a name tag on myself which one would I be would I be the religious leader would I be zealous for the truth would I be devoted would I be serious would I be disciplined would I study all the time would I be focused on the truth would I be focused on getting things right would I be critical would I be examining everything would I be making sure that everything is done correctly but in the midst of that do I miss God do I miss God working in my life do I miss God working in people's lives do I miss God working in the church do I see God at work and realize you know that can't be God because God would never do that that way

God only does it this way are we like him are we like the religious person I am there's often I put God in a box and often I think this is how it works and this is how it should be done and often I'm so worried about the timing and making sure everything gets done just perfectly and just right and I miss God or Jesus would have said are you like the woman or are you like the woman who comes bound up do you come to church and something has control in your life it's bent you over the Bible said this is the perfect example of sin in our life it's the perfect example of what sin does to you and me even after we come to know Christ that sin bends us over and it makes us crooked and so you came into church today and the question is what is putting you into bondage do you you have pains we have hurts we have concerns we have we have selfishness we have pride we have physical pains we have business concerns we have family burdens we have cultural concerns we have emotional baggage and this story calls out to us and it asks us the question do we realize that we're in bondage as we walk in here and the question is what is controlling us and Jesus asks you and I to this point of decision because he wants to change us the passage is all about

[38 : 30] Christ coming into our lives Christ coming into the church and noticing you and noticing me the passage is all about Christ coming into our lives and changing us and the only question we

have to ask ourselves is do we want Christ to do that or are we happy being bent over as we walk through life because the scripture says the Bible says that every one of us in here is controlled by things and these things bend us and spiritually if you could see people the way that God sees people he would see dead bent over people in bondage to things in life and this passage is all about Christ coming to you where you are right now and taking that bondage away the passage is all about

Christ seeing you knowing you listening to you caring for you having the power to step into your life and the only question you have to ask is do you want him to do it do you want him to do it it's interesting to me in this passage because this passage is pretty clear that there are not just one bent person but there are two bent people the religious leader and the woman the only difference is only one of them knows they have a problem and the leader thinks he's doing good you know my prayer for us as a church my prayer for you guys as individuals is that as we come to God's word as we come to community as we come to these passages that we would see his kingdom very clearly we would see why

God is working we see why he has you here we see what he wants to do in your life we would see his plan for you my prayer is as you come to God's word as we come to community as we come and listen that we would understand Christ's message that Jesus message is a message of freedom and release and taking us away from things that bond us up my prayer for us as a church is that we would understand this is why God has brought us here and come to church and do church and leave and have the focus on us but we realize that we come to the Sabbath to worship an amazing God who's freed us and brought us to this place who are you in the story are you bent are the things that are controlling you right now that are bending you over the only hope for that is Christ he's the only one that can make crooked people straight let me pray for us father we just thank you for this day we thank you for your word we thank you that we come to you and your word changes us we thank you that you are continually pursuing us father I have to confess that sometimes we walk into places and we feel like we're all alone I feel like I'm all alone and I wonder if you're there but your word says very clearly that you are the God who notices us who comes into our life to heal and to change us so Lord as I think of this woman who has been in bondage for 18 years I realize that there are some of us here who have been in bondage for 18 years there are some of us here who haven't even started the journey of walking with you and we think we're doing okay but when the rest of the people look at us they see people who are bent over and in bondage what

I pray for those here that they would see through your word your care and your love for them and they would surrender their lives and ask you to come into them come into their life and to change them just as you've put a little peck of yeast into the dough Lord we pray that you would insert your spirit into us and that it would change us if I know there are some of us here as followers of Christ and we've been following Christ for a long time but we've allowed things to come in and to bind us and though we know you for eternity we don't know you for tomorrow and we walk around crooked Lord we just pray that you would change us Father help us to surrender our lives to you help us to realize that you are the God who straightens people you are the God who heals people and [43 : 53] Lord I pray for us as a church that as we look at these messages and these passages and we think of eternity in the people that we walk to work with or we live in our house with or we go into the apartment complex or we hang out at the swimming pool with Father help us to be this message help us to be the person who speaks truth and allows you to enter into their life and to change them Lord we are so humbled that you noticed us and so we come before you and we worship this morning and we pray all these things in your son Jesus name amen amen amen hey can you please be seated just for one second or not one second more than one second we have a couple quick announcements I feel like because we're starting as the fall comes and new people are coming it's kind of like my kids coming after vacation we had to talk to them about this is what you do this is what you don't do and so I want to invite Natalie and Eric to come on up and to talk about a very special event that we're going to have the first one in our church right hey watermark how are you this morning good okay well my name is

Natalie Mann and I'm the coordinator of children's ministry here at watermark and I'm Eric Scott I'm the youth guy here at watermark youth dude and we have a very special event coming up as some of you know next Sunday is the day when the kids ministry kids move up to the grade that they are going into for this coming school year which means that for the oldest group of watermark kids

they're moving from watermark kids to watermark youth it's a big deal and we wanted to take an opportunity to celebrate this milestone in their lives and introduce them to the watermark youth ministry at the same time so we have an event coming up this Friday night called surfs up because the oldest class is surf class and at the community center in Tsai Ing Poon and it's for the kids who are entering US grade 6 or UK year 7 or Hong Kong primary 6 and they are invited along with their families and all current youth to introduce them to the watermark youth ministry that's right so this is huge for those kids moving from watermark kids to watermark youth so any of you families out there that has one of those kids

Friday night August 31st 7 to 9 at the watermark community center if you need the address please ask or look it up online whatever you prefer dinner will be provided so that's that's pretty cool and if you'd like to come please RSVP to us by Wednesday the 29th of August you can RSVP at youth at watermark church dot HK that's it any questions feel free to ask but it's going to be a great celebration thank you and for all you dads out here if your kid comes to ask you what grade you're in they're in just say go talk to mom okay because I'm like grade six year seven what you know and I'm just like I can't even remember my kid's age what grade they're in or things like that you know last week we came here and a guy at the end of it said what's up with offering and I'm like I was like what do you mean like how do we do offering and he goes no what is offering and I was like well okay that's a long sermon series right but offering is basically from the beginning of God's relationship with his people he is giving us resources and time and talents give a part of those resources back to him so that he might use it in his work and also that it is an act of faith for us to trust him I remember I shared this with a banker one time and he said you're telling God's given me 100% of all these things and he's only asking for 10 15% back that's great my taxes are much worse than that this time we're taking a step of faith if you're here new please don't tithe if you're not in a family of God and you're just checking things out please don't tithe this is a family issue but the Bible says really clearly that it is an act of worship is what we do as we understand grace and mercy that

God has given to us is active faith and so we would ask if you're part of the watermark family you've been here for more than two or three times to consider worshiping the Lord with your finances and everything that you tithe to the church goes to make outreach and everything else possible that we do here so that was tithing another person came and said what the deal with community groups like what is community group I feel kind of awkward just going to somebody's house I never met them before what does that look like that is a great question community groups for us we feel like this is the big gathering but to really get to know people to have people speak into your life to be accountable and to ask questions in a non threatening way we have broken everybody in the church and we have community groups small gatherings of people all over Hong Kong and starting one in TST in two weeks and so community groups are a place where people come you eat a lot of food you fellowship get to know people you ask questions you pray you have people get into your life our community group

[49 : 32] Kelvin and these guys we don't just meet on Fridays but we do lunches together outside in the business community it's just a time of knowing that there are other people who are involved in your life they know you and they're praying for you I think I have a picture of this is our community group last Friday and so that's our community group in our home and as you can tell we have a lot of people there actually we only want about 8 to 12 people in every community group and so one of the things we have been praying about a lot is that God would raise up leaders to go out and start other community groups and so I want to bring some of those people up today so I want to ask Franklin and Therese so Franklin is one of the three elders with Charles and myself and so Franklin and Therese Aaron and Haley and Cindy and Kelvin if you guys can come up here really quickly and I just want to introduce you really and so that people can know you so these represent two new groups that are starting one is breaking off from our group and we're hoping to have a couple other people break off and start up in different places and so they're going to be starting up community groups at different times and in different parts of the island and so

I just wanted to bring them up so you could see them afterward there's a community group table out front they'll be there to answer any questions you have any questions about community group or about their group and but this is kind of like the lifeblood of our church if you say what do we do next or how do I get plugged in at watermark we said we want you to be in a community of people who know you who can pray for you and can do fun things so Franklin you want to you and Teresa I

make very you guys going to be the first community group off of the island right so you want to share really quickly about your group well I'm Franklin I'm Teresa September 13th we'll be starting a group on West Kowloon at Sorrento above the elements the place where you shop so you can come down for dinner on Thursday we do meet every second and fourth Thursday evening at 715 like

Tobin said food will be there we'll eat together we'll laugh together we'll study and discuss together well when Tobin asked about Kowloon it seems to be long ways away but we are actually one bus ride away to Watermark for bus 970 and 971 and or go by the MTR over to Central and one minibus ride away to Cyberport here so it's very close no you meant one stop away from Kowloon station no from Hong Kong to Kowloon station so you get a good feel what their group is going to be like husband speaks wife correct so if that touches a vein in you then you need to go to there okay so that's that's very good right okay and then Kelvin and Cindy and their girls

Esther and Holly and Aaron and Haley and Gracie they're going to start a group and we're just calling it Happy Valley group so you guys want to share about your group sure our group will be meeting in Happy Valley and Ty Hang Road and we're excited because as of now in Happy Valley there's not a watermark small group so we're really excited about reaching out to that community and loving on that community inviting people in to our homes just to come to an environment of love and fun and hopefully an environment of family and I know that's our heart and so yeah we'll be meeting we'll be meeting at Aaron's and Haley's home and that's at Happy Valley you need a race course where people bet and you can put your bet in and then come to community group that's right and then you can go back and check the winning plan and then we'll also try to move around sometime we'll be at

Taihang Illumination Terrace at our place and we also we might meet at the community center sometimes and I think every couple of weeks or months we may crash in Tobin's care group just to say hi and I guess they'll be very lonely by then and when are you guys meeting again we'll be meeting on Saturday afternoons 4 to 6 and then followed by dinner kids young kids babies all welcome and you know we'll try to reach out to the communities in Happy Valley through the meals and everything so we have about 13 community groups right now around Hong Kong we have five more that are just starting off this next two weeks and so we're going to bring them up and introduce you to them and if you're in any of these areas or you like the dynamics or you just want to go check it out we would encourage you to go check out a couple community groups and just find one that you feel comfortable in as a family and be a part of that and join that and so these guys will be out front at the table so please feel free to ask them any questions about their group and why you should be in one of their groups okay so thank you so much guys so I'm going to pray for us and we'll just close our time is that good by the way thank you for this day and I think even as we just sending people out from our community group to launch other community groups

[55 : 03] I pray for their families I pray for the communities that they're being placed in I pray that they would be light in the salt that their presence would change the community that they're in as they do outreaches as they do community groups as they eat in fellowship we know that you've called us to be on this journey in community and not by ourselves and so I just thank you for these leaders pray that you would encourage them and bless them in their time and I pray for everyone in the Watermark family that we would be in some kind of small group community where people know us and we're known and we can know others and speak truth and love and encourage and outreach together as you've called us to do so Lord we thank you for this day we lift it up to you often I would come to church and I would think the day is about me and getting rested and getting rejuvenated for Monday and it took me a long time to realize that the day is about you and so I pray that we would be a church that realizes that today is about you and as we walk forth from these doors we would celebrate your goodness and your mercy and your grace as you you came to us when we were bent over and you presented the gospel to us you presented mercy to us and you you saved us the dough could do nothing you saved us and so we just we love you and we pray all these things in your son Jesus name amen god bless you they'll be out there we'll see you next Sunday