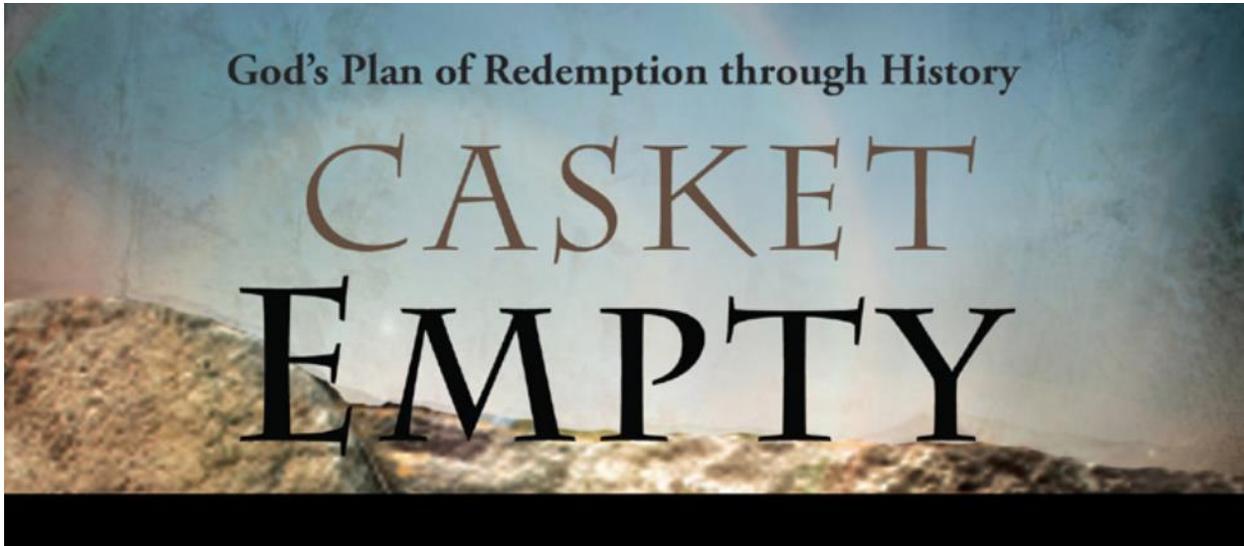


T is for Teaching – Part 1
CASKET EMPTY Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
April 29, 2018

TEXTS: Galatians 1:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 1:1-6



Good morning, beloved church family. It is a joy to turn our attention this morning to God's Word. If you are just joining us in this series, we are engaged in a year-long study that helps us see the big picture of God's Word. We are using the acronym CASKET EMPTY that guides us through the whole counsel of God. CASKET takes us through the Old Testament. Let's try it together quickly to review: C is for Creation; A is for Abraham; S is for Sinai; K is for Kings; and E is for Exile; and T is for Temple. We turn to the New Testament: E is for Expectations; M is for Messiah; P is for Pentecost; T is for Teaching; and Y is for Yet-to-Come. We turn to TEACHING this morning. Teaching is a vital part of Christianity. It is an essential aspect of global missions. When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He said: "Go into all the earth, make disciples of all nations," and what's the next phrase? "Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded." Christianity's mission involves instruction. Jesus' most frequent term for us as disciples is "learners." That means that an essential quality of those who follow Jesus is that they are constantly learning. They are not learning to pass a test, not cramming for an exam, but they are learning God's ways because God's ways are infinitely higher than our ways, and they must be learned. Jesus doesn't ask, "What do you think?" He tells us how we are supposed to live, and so the instruction goes forth, and it is a teaching to obey everything He has command.

I grew up in a household where we never used the word *obey* or *obedience*, except for when

the dogs were being trained. Dogs went to obedience school, but humans hardly ever use that word. But I have grown, after being led to faith in Christ, and now as an adult, I have grown to love the word *obey*, because obey means that I listen to the voice of my heavenly Father, and I want to do what He says. I have learned to trust His Word enough to know that when He tells me to do something, it is for my own good. I've learned enough of His character to know that even if I don't understand in the short term, I trust that He is working in me a weight of glory that cannot be compared. So, we are to learn to obey everything He has commanded, and through the empowering presence of the Spirit that we've been talking about through looking at PENTECOST, Jesus' followers spread out, sharing the gospel in an expanding sphere of witness throughout the world that they knew. We ourselves this morning are direct beneficiaries of people's obeying Jesus' command to go into all the nations. They went sharing the gospel.

After people come to believe the gospel, they then need to learn how to live, because God's ways are higher than ours. They must be taught, and so one of the most remarkable features of the New Testament is that 21 of the 27 documents that make up the New Testament are in fact letters written to early Christian communities on how to live as followers of Jesus. Sometimes we call these letters *books*, when in fact they are letters. Sometimes we use the fancy term *epistle*. *Epistle* is just the Greek word for *letter*, so whether you call them epistles, if you're in that kind of a frame of mind, or you just call them letters, you probably shouldn't call them *books* because they're not really books. They are letters written to early communities on how to follow Jesus Christ. There are 21 of them, arranged in the New Testament according to the Greek library conventions of the day, and that is by author and descending length. So, if you have ever wondered why Romans is the first letter, it is not because Romans is the most important—although it is astonishingly important. It is first because it is the longest, and the letters are arranged, not chronologically, but by author and descending length. These letters provide for us the substance and content that unifies Christian mission.

We have been using the CASKET EMPTY book and the timeline. If you look at the New Testament timeline, you will see that in the time of Acts or Pentecost, the letters are woven into the narrative chronologically. If you look on the timeline at the letters during the time of Teaching, the letters just explode out on the known world. They all have a tagline in yellow and the name of the letter in red for the Lord has sent us with a message that centers in the death of Jesus for forgiveness of our sins, and His resurrection is the dawn of new life. That's what unifies the Christian church.

This morning, we are going to look at the beginning of four letters. Before we look at these, I want to stress again that the role of the church, and of Christians in general, as teachers of the

world, is an enduring responsibility. As you know, my wife is a seminary professor. Our daughter is an aspiring teacher, and I am a pastor, which has a lot of teaching in it. So, when our son Jonathan was little, he was surrounded by teachers, and he would sometimes get taught the same lesson multiple times. When it trickled down to that peer level and our daughter would grab him, sit him down for another 'teaching moment,' he finally put up his resistance, and he said, "Salome, don't tell me things I already know!" Sometimes as believers we get tempted to lose our focus on what the essential truths of the New Testament are, and we get familiar with that. I want to challenge us, as we dive into the teaching component, I want to vaccinate you against a false familiarity with the gospel, because the gospel is astonishing. One of the negative outcomes of a false familiarity with the gospel is that we say, "Oh, we already know that." No, we don't know that. The gospel compels our service. I want to fall in love with the gospel every morning. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the best news the world was ever received, and it is different from any other religion. It is the jewel in the crown of Christian teaching, and as we look at these letters, we have to see the centrality of the gospel.

Some of us pick up from our culture that following God should be intuitive. We should trust our heart. Have you ever heard that? Some of you may have thought that, but do you know what God's Word says about our heart? God's Word says that the human heart is deceptive. We are experts at lying to ourselves. We don't want to trust our heart; we want to trust God's Word and say: "Teach me, oh Lord," as we open His Word, and we have this responsibility of teaching the gospel to others. So, even as we begin, I want to challenge you with this question: "Who is the last person in your life that you taught the gospel to?" Was it last week? Last month? Or can you not think of someone this past year? If we are not teaching the gospel, then we are not obeying Jesus. We may be distracted from it, so let's let God's Word pull us back into the center, back into alignment with His Word.

We are going to look briefly at four of the opening paragraphs of Paul's missionary letters. I am going to go through these chronologically. Let's turn first to Galatians 1. Galatians is the first of Paul's letters written to the church in the wake of his first missionary journey. Galatians begins in Galatians 1:1 with:

"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead."

The word apostle means an emissary, an ambassador, someone sent to represent another. Paul is not representing himself. He is an apostle, not from men or through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. We see the centrality of Jesus' death and resurrection. We see that being sent out is not something that happens by the will of people, but that we represent someone else. Christ's reputation is at stake in our mission. We

serve Him, Messiah and King. Paul sends greetings from all the brothers were with him. Though we imagine Paul often ministering alone, in fact, this is not the case at all. When we read God's Word carefully, half of Paul's letters are sent from Paul and Timothy. Paul never ministered alone. We see that this model of establishing a group of people to help lead the church. The church should never be led by one person, and it should never be led by everyone, because then none of us are following Christ. He says in Galatians 1:2: *"and all the brothers who were with me."*

The letter is sent to the churches, and notice that it is plural—to the churches of Galatia. When the Word of Christ goes forth, it births new communities in an area, in a region. There is not just one church; there are communities, gatherings, churches spread throughout this entire region. Where the gospel goes forth, people believe and they come together and start to live their lives together through faith in Christ and express that new life in Christ visibly to their community. Paul will say in one of his last letters that gathered Christian communities are like colonies of heaven on earth. Is that what you think as you look around? This is an advanced sign of where we are going. Just the fact that we've gathered on Sunday morning is a testimony to our community that Jesus has been raised from the dead. The fact that we are here on Sunday is a testimony that God's new creation has begun. To the churches, plural. I think Paul would have been delighted to hear that there are 2500 churches in Cincinnati. Eighty percent of the churches in the United States are made up of less than 100 people. God's design is that we live in community together and that we know one another. Most churches, the overwhelming number of churches in the world, are small by human eyes, so you know one another. Even large churches, people in large churches, say the church is real to me in my small group or community group. In an impersonal world, we have good news about a personal Savior. Paul says in Galatians 1:3:

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,"

Paul coins here a distinctive double greeting that is testimony to the Christian gospel. *Grace* is the typical Greek greeting; *peace* is the typical Hebrew greeting, and Paul joins these two worlds together uniquely. The Christian community is rooted in the Scriptures of Israel, but now it includes all nations. This grace, this peace, comes to us through Christ, in Galatians 1:4:

". . .who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,"

This is the heart of the gospel: Christ died for our sins. Christ's death for our sins means that is what we need, that means that the earth has a problem and it is not global warming. The earth has a problem that is life-threatening. The life-threatening problem on planet earth is our rebellion against our heavenly Father. That's the life-threatening problem, and the solution for that problem is Christ's death. Christ's death for our sins, then, delivers us. Notice, and this is so

important—that Christ’s death delivers us from this evil age. Paul is using this two-age chronology that comes to us from the Scriptures of former days and latter days. Christ’s death rescues us from this time of darkness, not by taking us out of the world, but by causing us to be reborn as a colony of heaven in this world, *“to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”* Would that the first paragraph of Galatians stopped right there. This a great beginning, isn’t it? The centrality of Christ; the priority of the gospel. But the reality of the gospel is so revolutionary, so astonishing, that the enemy of our souls wants to distract our attention from the gospel.

In Paul's very first paragraph of his first letter, after this beautiful greeting in Galatians 1:6, he says:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”

He is astonished, he is amazed, he is shocked, he is in fearful trepidation that they would believe in Christ and are deserting Him. What’s going on? In Galatians 1:7, he says:

“...not that there is another [gospel], but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

There were some who were troubling them, literally agitating them and distorting or distracting them from the gospel. So, look out! This happens. It happens in an ultraconservative way sometimes, where people say, “Okay, you know the gospel is great—Jesus died for my sins, was raised from the dead, but let’s talk about the millennium.” Others say: “Okay, Jesus rose from the dead. That’s great, that’s exciting that Jesus rose from the dead, but I want to talk about the difference between infant baptism and believer’s baptism.” Yet others say, “Oh, yeah, Jesus died and rose again, the gospel, yeah, yeah, I got that, but what English version are you using? If the King James Version was good enough for Paul, it's good enough for me!” When anyone asks that question, “Why don’t we use the King James?” this is how I always respond. “If you are going to have surgery next week, do you want the physician to use the most up-to-date available technologies for that surgery, or do you want to have a retro experience? Would you like your doctor to say, “You know what? I want to limit this surgery to what we knew in 1611.” I’ve yet to have anyone say, “You know, I want that. I want to get in touch with pain in a new way.” No one says that, for good reasons. There is a reality on a very conservative side, but there's a reality on what might be perceived as a more liberal direction: “Oh, yeah, yeah. The gospel is Jesus died for my sins, great resurrection, but what we really need to be about is social justice and affirmative action.” There are all kinds of ways that we can get distracted and put secondary things in first place, and Paul is alarmed that we would do anything to move the gospel out of first place. If you hear us talking more about something other than Jesus Christ and this gospel, say, “Friend, brothers, sisters, let’s keep our eyes on the main thing!”

Let's look at Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Again, we see that Paul does not minister alone. The missionary team is a group. This letter is sent from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Silvanus is the same as Silas, the same person. Silas was in prison with Paul later in his life. Silas ended up helping Peter write his letters, but this letter is written from Paul and Silvanus, which means in Latin *Mr. Woods*, a *woodsman*, and is sent again to the church. It's a church of the city. Notice that is a church gathered in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it's powerful to note that Paul's most frequent description of a Christian is a person who is in Christ. We believe in Him and so we are in Him. Again, the double greeting: "Grace to you and peace," two worlds coming together. He thanks God for all of these believers in Christ, gathered as a church in Thessalonica. He constantly mentions them in prayer. For every second, for every minute that you see a leader up front, there should be 10 times as much ministry and love that you don't see: prayer, counseling, shepherding. This is one of the most significant responsibilities for those in church leadership. Paul's ministry, though it was visible and public in many ways, was supported by that hidden labor of prayer, counseling, shepherding people. He prays for them regularly, and we hear the content of his prayers as he remembers before our God and Father this unique triad of virtues that we hear for the first time. He says in 1 Thessalonians 1:3:

"...remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

We don't usually put faith and work together, do we? Paul says, "I remember your of faith," because faith translates into action. I remember your "labor of love." That's a phrase we use occasionally, right? "It was a labor of love," and your "steadfastness of hope." In Paul's preaching and teaching ministry, he began to use this triad of virtues: faith, love, and hope, repeatedly. He's the only author in antiquity to use these three together: faith, love, and hope, or, sometimes, faith, hope, and love. Faith is that trust in Jesus Christ and His death for our sins; love is the working out of that faith; and hope is our certainty in Christ's glorious return, and these virtues define the Christian community. He says in 1 Thessalonians 1:4:

"For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you,"

We are loved by God, chosen, two terms that are used regularly of Israel in the Old Testament, and Paul now generously applies these words to all believe in Christ. You are this; you are the people of God, because our gospel, there it is again, he says in 1 Thessalonians 1:5:

"...because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

The word of the cross, trusting in Jesus' death for sin, the reality of His resurrection. They believed and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to meet together, and their faith and their love and their hope in Christ united them.

Let's look at Paul's next letter: Galatians, with his first missionary journey; Thessalonians is written at the end of this second missionary journey; and now at the end of his third missionary journey, we see the letters to the Corinthians and to the Romans. In 1 Corinthians 15, we have this singularly important passage. It is really the theme passage of our series for the year. It is the theme passage for the entire CASKET EMPTY series. He reminds us yet again in 1 Corinthians 15:1:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you,”

You might be thinking to yourself: “I don't need to be reminded of the gospel. I know it.” Brothers and sisters, we easily get distracted. We get distracted from the gospel, and then we might be tempted to think that the gospel is just for us, even if we do understand it. But the gospel is something that is infinite in scope and scale, and if you understand it, then it takes center place in your affections. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:1-2:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you unless you believed in vain.”

The gospel has to be announced; it has to be proclaimed. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not intuitive; it is not something that you discover by looking within. It has to be announced, shared, taught. The gospel has to be received; it's good news about Christ that you have to take into you. The gospel is truth on which you can stand. The Greek mathematician, Archimedes, who invented the lever, said: “You know, if you give me a place to stand, then I can move the earth.” That's the power of the lever. This gospel, this truth, is a place on which you can stand and be unmoved by life's storms. Jesus said at the end of the sermon on the Mount: “If you build your life upon this rock, then the storms of this life will come, but your house will stand.” You can stand here, and the gospel is also that good news by which you are saved, being saved. Notice that that is passive. Aren't you glad that we cannot save ourselves? The gospel is good news by which you are being saved. If—and you say, “Wow, is there a condition? Yes, there is! You have got to hold fast to “the Word I preached, unless you believe in vain.” Sometimes we can say: “Oh, yeah, I believe in Christ and now I'm moving on to something else.” You haven't believed in Christ. You have got to hold fast. Some of you may be wondering what the gospel is. The Corinthians were probably wondering what the gospel is, and now Paul tells us with one of the clear statements of the New Testament: “I delivered to you, I handed to you as of first importance what I also received.” Paul is not the inventor of the gospel; he received it, and this is the gospel, 1 Corinthians 15:3:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”

This was God's plan and purpose for humanity. This is the heart of the gospel, the good news that is at the center of Christian faith—that Jesus Christ died for our sins. This is the healing that we need, that Jesus Christ was raised. His offering for sin was accepted and new life begins if and only if we trust in Him. Jesus Christ raises the dead and gives them new life. All of this happened in accordance with God's Word: forgiveness and new life.

The last letter we look at this morning is Paul's letter to the Romans. It is a church that he did not plant. It is a church that he had never visited. It is a church that he intended to visit on his way to the uttermost parts of the earth. He was heading for the Roman province of *Hispania*, modern-day Spain. It was the western extremity of the earth that Paul knew, and he wanted to go there to proclaim Christ. Some of us are terrified walk across the street, and he was compelled by the love of Christ to go the edge of the world that he knew. He wrote this letter to the church in Rome asking for their support, and yet in the opening paragraph, the opening sentence, we see yet again the centrality of the gospel. He says in Romans 1:1:

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,”

In the rest of this opening sentence, Paul unfolds for us the gospel. The gospel is God's good news. It belongs to Him, and it is His gospel. It is a gospel, he says in Romans 1:2:

“which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,”

The gospel has got saving purpose articulated in what we call the Old Testament. Paul called it just the holy Scriptures. The gospel is about, Romans 1:3:

“concerning His Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh,”

His Son, a descendent of David according to his earthly lineage, and yet, in Romans 1:4:

“was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This good news of God about His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is glorious. Paul says in Romans 1:5 that this gospel about His Son, Jesus Christ, has an effect on us. Romans 1:5 is a critical passage that is often neglected. It is for the mature Christian to really take to heart. The gospel of God, the good news about Christ who died and rose again, His saving purpose articulated in Scriptures, Paul says:

“Through [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations,”

This is grace that you cannot find anywhere else. Through Jesus Christ, you get grace. No one is talking about grace in the first century, and very few people are talking about grace of the 21st century. We are angry, we are divided as a culture. We cannot tolerate the slightest deviation of points of view. We surround ourselves, virtually and in real time, with people who agree with

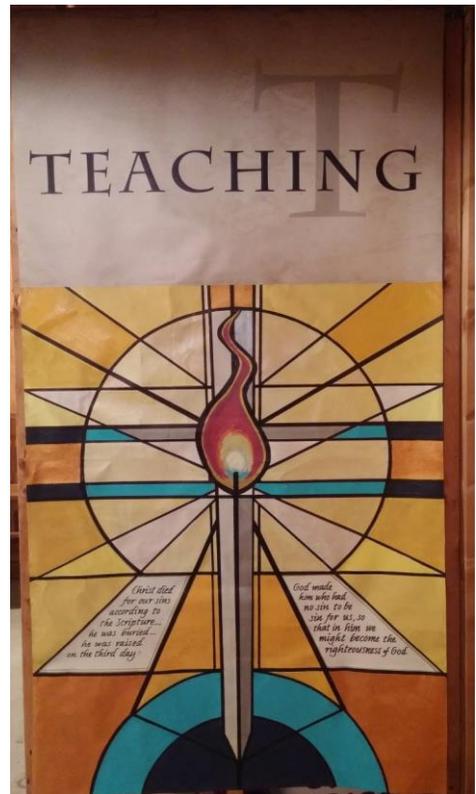
us on every point, and if you wrong me, I will hold onto it. That is the deceptive human heart. Watch out for it. It's dangerous; it's death-dealing. We clamor, the deceptive human heart: "Give me my rights; give me what I deserve." No one who understands the gospel ever says that! Never come before the living God with the demand for what you deserve. You know what we deserve? You know what David Palmer deserves? I do. I deserve the righteous fury of the wrath of Almighty God for all the days of my life that I lived like He didn't even exist, for all the moments when I took credit for things that I could never have done without His power in my life. Jesus said we will give account for every careless word. Do not ask the living God for what you deserve. When our eyes are fixed on the cross of Christ, His death, His resurrection, we receive grace, forgiveness, unmerited favor.

Oh, grace is one of our most precious words. We are the only ones who can announce to the world: "This is where you go to find forgiveness—to Jesus Christ." There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the judgment of God has fallen on Him, in your place and mine. This is the first great benefit that we receive from the gospel: We get grace. Most of us want to stop here, but we can't because Paul doesn't stop here. We receive grace and apostleship. In other words, we receive grace, forgiveness of our sins, and we receive a mission. As it turns out, Christianity isn't just for us. The gospel is God's unmerited favor, and then gives us a mission, apostleship, to bring about—we are commissioned to bring about—the obedience that flows out of faith for the sake of His Name among all the nations. If you receive the gospel, Christ's death for your sins, His resurrection to new life, and you receive grace, then you must also hear that you have received a mission, and that mission has this objective: to bring about this transformation in all the earth—people who were disobedient to God, now obedient to Him. It's amazing! I love to hear this transformation. I love to hear it for the first time.

Monday was a huge day for Kenwood with ministry at Mars Hill Academy, at UC, and here in the evening. I know I personally interacted with over 1000 people on Monday. It was great! Thank you for everyone who served. Of those thousand interactions, the most meaningful was the one that happened in the back hallway, going down the stairs, coming into the Fellowship Hall. I saw a man with tears; Pastor Glenn standing next to him. He was crying. I looked at Pastor Glenn: "What's going on?" Pastor Glenn manage to get out: "It's big night for him." I looked at this man and asked: "What is going on?" He said, "I just needed someone to explain the gospel clearly to me. I'm going with Jesus!" It was worth all the effort, wasn't it? That's what we're supposed to be about: new life in Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we receive grace and mission, and the teaching ministry of the church must go forth, We have a new banner this Sunday. It's the TEACHING banner. It was beautifully

done by Susan Rice. The TEACHING banner draws our attention to the Word of God, the light of the gospel going out unto all the earth. There are two verses tucked in underneath this Sword of the Spirit. Susan is an artist and she is also theologically in tune. It's been amazing how these artists have done such beautiful work to adorn the sanctuary, and Susan just tucked in under this radiant light going forth of the gospel: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, He was raised on the third day." On the other panel underneath this sword, she just tucked in: "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" 2 Corinthians 5:21. I can't think of anything more exciting than serving together around the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm so moved by all of the different ways that I've seen members of our family reaching out. Whom have you shared the gospel of Christ with recently? That's the question we all should be able to answer. If you don't know the gospel, then learn it. Learn its central features. If someone is distracting you from it say: "Brother, sister, let me just remind you what this is really about. This is what ties us together."



The biggest percentage of people that came Monday night to hear Vince and Jo Vitale were from the community. That means that that you all were faithful in asking people whom you know don't know Christ to be here. I want to close with what I saw happen during the book signing. As the books were being signed, and Vince and Jo Vitale were interacting with people, a woman came through the line. She looked at Jo, and she said, "I've experienced a lot of things in my life that have left me covered with shame, and I heard tonight that Jesus Christ took my sin." She started crying, and Jo did just what she should have done. She left the book signing table and went and prayed with this woman for new life in Christ—grace, unmerited favor. Brothers and sisters, let us be about the gospel, knowing it and sharing it, living it together. That's our mission, to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of His name.

Amen.