



Strong Encouragement for New Believers

Luke 7:18-35

March 18, 2018

In the good providence of God, we have a unique opportunity today. This Sunday, today is not just a Baptism Sunday, it's not just a Righthand of Fellowship Sunday, as we bring new members into our fellowship. But it's also, as you can see before you, it's a Communion Sunday. And God has granted us just a little time, maybe some unhurried moments that we can use to prepare ourselves to partake of the Lord's Table together this morning. We have, all of us, witnessed this morning already a Christian baptism. And Christian baptism is the entry ordinance into the local church.

By the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we're, we're joined to Christ, that's a spiritual reality. And if we're joined to Christ, that means we are joined to one another as well. It says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For in one Spirit," for in one Spirit,

we were all baptized, “we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” For those who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit, it’s a spiritual immersion into Christ and a union with him, we all were baptized, obeyed Christ’s command to undergo a physical baptism, as well.

That physical baptism is a symbol, a visible symbol of what has happened to all of us Christians spiritually speaking. By the Holy Spirit, we’re united with Christ in his burial as we go down under the water and into the water, death, burial and then brought up from the water, that’s resurrection. That’s a picture of what’s happened to us. So physical baptism is really a testimony, not just to one another in the church, but really to the watching world.

Later in the service, we’re going to partake of the Lord’s Supper together and that we call the fellowship ordinance of the church. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:17, “The cup of blessing that we bless is none other than a corporate participation in the blood of Christ. The bread we break, Paul



calls that "a participation in the body of Christ." That word that the ESV translates, participation, that's the Greek word *koinonia*. You may be familiar with that word *koinonia*. It means fellowship.

Fellowship is not just eating food and having conversation together, as we like to do. Fellowship is really a union with Christ. It's a communion with him around the Lord's Table and that's why we call the Lord's Table a fellowship ordinance. Together, corporately, we share, we communion, we commune with, we, we fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ who's risen and glorified, who's now at the father's right hand. He is there right now interceding for us, according to the will of God. He is shepherding the church, this church, from his throne in heaven. And he's shepherding each one of us by name.

According to the will of God, Christ is bringing new members into our membership. These are people that we as a church have a responsibility to disciple, to help them to grow into maturity in Christ. All the older members, the people who've been a Christian for a, you know, a good number of years, it's your

responsibility to disciple these younger members, to live in such a way that your life is pointing them to Christ, to speak in such a way that you encourage them toward Christ. And actually, to take an active part in discipling them and spurring them on toward love and good works. So part of growing into maturity together means regular participation in this fellowship ordinance around this communion table as we together revisit the Gospel, as we celebrate all that unites us in Christ.

All of that to say, as I was reflecting on what we've recently learned in Luke's Gospel and in preparation for today, knowing the kind of service this is going to be, I was thinking about what we learned in Luke 7, those three statements of Christ. We ended with them last week. But those three statements of Christ that kind of punctuate the end of each part of the section on John the Baptist. They're found in Luke 7:23, Luke 7:28 and Luke 7:35.

And in one sense those three statements, they act in context as a word of warning to anybody in that crowd who would be led astray, following ungodly leadership, desiring the approval of

men, rather than the approval of God. But in another sense, when we read those three statements, when Jesus spoke them in the hearing of a large crowd, a mixed crowd, Jesus is really in those three statements speaking to his sheep. Those three statements are words, words of encouragement, words of comfort.

And as I said, they really punctuate the end of each part of Jesus' teaching on John the Baptist. Those words are words of strong encouragement for new believers. Because while Jesus is addressing the crowds there, he is speaking to those among the crowds who truly belong to him. They're true believers. He's speaking words of encouragement to his sheep. And get it, get this point, at this moment in history, in redemptive history, these are all new believers. They're just coming to faith in Christ. They're learning. They've been prepared by John the Baptist and now they're looking to Jesus Christ and hearing from him.

And in, in the perspective of church history, these folks are the very newest of new believers. Those for whom those three statements are true. In Luke 7:23, 7:28, 7:35, all of those



people are going to be around just a short while, just a short number of years at the inception of the church. They're going to be there and receive the Holy Spirit. They're going to witness everything change.

As we've been baptizing folks into our church, we need to recognize that those people represent new believers in our midst and as a church, we have a responsibility to new believers, to teach them, to disciple them, to help them to grow. We need to realize that for new believers this is a, a very important time in their fledgling growth in Christ. The trajectory of their entire Christian lives will be set by these early formative years of learning, as they're learning to walk in truth, as they're learning to put off old habits, to mortify sin, to put on new habits, to learn how to love one another in wisdom.

For all new believers, there is an excitement, a joy in forgiven sin, and coming to realize and come to terms with the fact that they have a clean conscience before God, that they've been reconciled to the very God of the universe. So for new believers there is a new interest in and a new understanding of Holy

Scripture. The Bible now makes sense to them, that wasn't always the case. There's an eagerness now to, to please the Lord, to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, to give themselves fully and completely to the one who gave himself fully and completely for them.

At the same time, in this period, the, the joy of learning, the joy of growth, new believers often start to feel and sense the weight of sin in their life. The consequences of past sins, the struggle to overcome old habits of living, to put off old habits of thinking, to put on new patterns of thinking, some of that becomes difficult. The blessing of new life in Christ can start to feel overwhelming for some, perhaps even a bit discouraging.

We've all been through that. We understand that as Christians. We know how times of perplexity and discouragement brings us to the end of ourselves, which is good, and leads us to new vistas of joy and growth and holiness and joy in the spirit as we learn and know the Savior in sweeter fellowship, as we depend on him. So it's really good for the new believers in our midst, to go



through that struggle and to go through that struggle with us alongside of them, walking them through it.

And I think it's good for new believers now in our midst to hear these words of comfort and encouragement from the Lord and to hear these words from the very start of their Christian walk. For those of us who've been in Christ for a longer period of time, perhaps we could use the reminder as well, right? Not only do we have a duty to help these new believers apply the truth and to, to help them to grow, we have need of encouragement for ourselves. Sometimes we find that we've grown cold, distant. We need the encouragement from the Lord. We need the reminder.

This morning this message is to encourage new believers. It's to encourage all of you who have been saved for a short period of time, let's say five years or less, that you might grow strong in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. If you're less than five years old in the Lord, I want you to listen carefully to these, what is going to be simple, but profound words of encouragement from your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

But the message that I'm giving today is delivered with the whole church in mind because I want all of us to see our great responsibility here to minister to one another that we all together might grow strong in Christ. If you're five to 55 years old in the Lord, or even longer in Christ, I want you to consider carefully a few things. Ask yourself, as you sit there in your seat, as you think about the current condition of your relationship with Christ, as you think about your current energy, your current involvement in the church, as you think about your current involvement in the lives of other Christians, ask yourself how you are regularly and consistently and practically helping other Christians around you grow strong in Christ.

Think about the last time that you shared Christ with an unbeliever, and you did so in love because you're concerned for their soul. Ask the Lord, as you sit there today, whether you shared the whole gospel or just the happy parts. Did you share the hard parts? Did you use words like sin, and righteousness, and judgment, and wrath, and condemnation, and the warning of hell, and call to repentance, and point to faith in Christ for a



life of obedience, for a life of dying to self? Is that how you shared Christ?

Listen, if you're vision of Christ has dimmed somewhat, if your passion has cooled, if your love for Christ has grown somewhat cold, consider, as we go through this morning in a message for new believers how you maybe need to hear this afresh. Consider how you may need to repent for yourself and not just think about the person around you that needs to hear this or so and so. But return to your first love and fan into flame the passion that you once had.

In fact, I'd like you to look, this is a preview of coming attractions, but look at Luke 7, Luke 7 and verse 44. Consider whether your life, as you sit there now, resembles more the coldhearted Simon or the fervent love of the forgiven woman. Look at Luke 7:44, "Turning toward the woman Jesus said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint

my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.'"

How do you think of yourself? Are you one in need of just a little forgiveness because you're not really that big of a sinner? Or do you stand with that woman? Do you bow with that woman? Do you weep with that woman? Do you give yourself to that woman in public for the worship of Christ because you're filled with gratitude and joy? Think about the contrast. Simon had this calm, collected demeanor, didn't he? He'd been around the church for quite some time. He held positions of honor. He maintained a respectable image for others around him. He's not to be commended for that.

The woman here made a scene, not for the sake of making a scene but because her love for her Savior overcame her sense of self-consciousness and self-awareness. Her faith had saved her, and she could go in peace. Listen beloved, that's what we want to see stirred up in our church, a passionate and grateful and



fervent love for Jesus Christ that is unashamed and poured out on one another.

So I figured it'd be a good encouraging time for all of us, really, to stop and ponder what unites us together as baptized members of Christ's church. As we look forward to our fellowship with the risen Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord's Supper, we dare not come to him dispassionately. We dare not come to him in a calculated and cool manner. We come with hearts filled with passionate, grateful, fervent love.

Three points for this morning and they come from our recent study of Luke's Gospel, Luke 7:18-35. As Christ speaks words of encouragement and comfort to new believers, this is, just to warn you ahead of time, we've kind of been through formal exposition of this. This is less of a formal exposition this morning and more of a time of meditation and reflection on what we've been learning.

So here's the first word of comfort and encouragement from our Lord. It's all written there, outlined in your bulletin. But we

need to be encouraged, number one, we need to be encouraged that we embrace God's Messiah. Number one, we need to be encouraged that we embrace God's Messiah. Look at Luke 7:23, Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." New believer, are you offended by Christ? You say, no, of course not. I just professed faith in him and trust in him in the waters of baptism in front of all these people. Of course I am not offended by him. I love him. I worship him. He's forgiven me of all my sin.

Listen, you need to understand that that attitude, that joy, that passion, that desire for worship is no small thing. You need to stop and realize that we belong to a very, very small minority of people on this earth. We, in this building, we adhere to this ancient religion and we worship a crucified man, one that was condemned by the state and then handed over by his own people. I mean the whole world of popular opinion is against the one that we worshiped.

In popular judgment today, we look for hope in an old and outdated book. We preach a religion of, let's, let's just call it what they would say, dubious origins. We trust in a God whose

morals, in their judgment, are quite suspect. I mean, condemning homosexuals, wiping out whole civilizations and angry wrathful judgment, promoting the worship of a crucified Messiah, seriously? We do not make sense to the world.

We were born into this world thinking just like they did. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were blind to all of this and apart from the divine miracle of regeneration, like the people of First Century Palestine, we would also ignore John the Baptist. We would reject Jesus the Christ. We would persecute all the apostles and the prophets. We would persecute all those who follow their sayings and their teachings, apart from regeneration. Like the people of our own day, we would react to Christianity with anywhere from bored indifference to active hostility. But we don't. This is God's doing. This is not our own doing, it's God's doing.

Again, in verse 23, after interacting with the disciples of John the Baptist, going from 18-22, that section, Jesus spoke words of encouragement to his people. "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." The one who is not offended at Jesus, offended

by who he is, by what he does, by what he says. The one who is not offended, that's the one who embraces Jesus Christ. And it's not just that we're not ashamed of Christ. It's that we boast in him. We take pride in him. "Blessed in the one who is not offended by me."

As we've learned, the verb offend, it's the word *skandalizo*, to, to trip somebody up. We get our English word scandal, and the verb, to scandalize, from that word, but it's the idea of putting a stumbling block in somebody's way. For whom is Jesus Christ a stumbling block? Well first of all, it's for all those who try to shove Jesus into their own expectations. He's a stumbling block for all who want to conform him to their preconceived notions and ideas and that mentality started with and was typified by Jesus' own people, the Jewish nation.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "We preach Christ crucified, which is a stumbling block to the Jews." That's the same word, *skandalon*. Jesus didn't fit their expectations about what a Messiah should be and do and so they took offense at him. They rejected him. They ended up committing the greatest crime in

history, which is the bitterest irony of all time. They crucified their own Messiah. How bitterly ironic and sad.

But secondly, Jesus is a stumbling block to those who find his words offensive, his commands unreasonable, his thinking antiquated and outdated. All the irreligious, the non-Jews, the immoral by biblical identification, they're called Gentiles, that's us. We need to recognize the Jews had help in crucifying their Messiah. They were assisted in their crime by the Gentiles for whom Christ is also a stumbling block and a rock of offense. Paul said, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles."

So the Gentiles, too, they have set their expectations about what a Savior should be and do, and Jesus doesn't fit their expectations either. So they scoff. They laugh. They scorn and they mock, and they join the Jews in crucifying the only true Savior, Jesus the Christ. That is a big mistake. That is a fatal mistake of eternal consequence. All sinners, whether of the Jewish kind or the Gentile kind, all sinners, whether living in Jesus' day or our own time, all of them alike, Romans 9:32-33,

"Have stumbled over the stumbling stone as it is written,
'Behold, I am lying in Zion, a stone of stumbling and a rock of
offence and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'"

Paul is quoting there from two places in Isaiah. I'd like you to
turn back to Isaiah chapter 8, Isaiah chapter 8. And while
you're turning there, I'm going to read from the other place
that Paul quotes from, which is Isaiah 28:16. In Isaiah 28:16,
this is one of the references, "Therefore thus says the Lord
God, 'Behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion, a
stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone stone of a sure
foundation: "And whoever believes will not be in haste,"'" or
another way to translate that is, "that will not be disturbed,
panicked, or put to shame," which is how Paul renders it.

The other passage Paul quotes from, Isaiah 8:11-15, "For the
Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and he
warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: 'Do not
call a conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do
not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts,
him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him

be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, to trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

I hope you caught that. The Lord God of Israel, Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts, he is a rock. He is *the rock*, period. He is rock-like and for some, that rock is a rock of refuge, a sanctuary beneath which we hide, but for many, for both houses of Israel, for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that rock is a stone of stumbling, an offensive rock. It's a trap and a snare. Then this in verse 15, "Many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken." That is to say, swept away in judgment.

According to that prophetic warning, Simeon also prophesied this when Jesus was just a baby. He said, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that's opposed so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." So when Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me," Luke 7:23, that's a word of warning to those who would be offended of him. But it's a word of comfort and



encouragement to those who believe; same intent of Isaiah's words, as well, strong encouragement to all who believe.

New believer, do not fear what they fear. New believer, do not be in dread, but the Lord of Hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, let him be your dread. And I can tell you this, new believer, if that one is your fear, you will fear nobody else. You will fear nothing else if you fear him and him alone. "The righteous are as bold as a lion. But the wicked flee but no one pursues."

What makes the difference between Isaiah and those whom God calls to belong to him on the one hand and then the many who do stumble over this stumbling stone? What makes the difference between them? Turn over to the New Testament, 1 Peter chapter 2, 1 Peter chapter 2. And Peter also quotes from this in Isaiah. You find the same passage quoted again, and here we learn why we believe and others do not, 1 Peter 2:4-10, "As you come to him," that is Christ, "a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,

to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone.'" I love that imagery of standing. Of course it's standing. It's a stone. You don't move it. It is what it is.

"'I'm laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

You see the answer? Why we believe, why you new believers turned away from all your friends, family, who condemn you; away from this culture who thinks this is totally ludicrous what we're

doing here. Why we believe and they do not, what is the difference. There in verse 7. The honor that we have received of not being offended by Christ, of not stumbling over the stumbling stone, that honor is for those of you who believe. Why do you believe, and others don't? Are you smarter than they are? Well, let's just say it's easier to see when the lights are turned on. "They all stumble," end of verse 8. The world stumbles because the lights are off. "They disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you," verse 9, emphatic contrast there. "But you yourselves are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim his glory." Let's just say that.

You can turn back to Luke 7 now. We learn from Jesus that those who are not offended by him, not scandalized by him, we learn that they are blessed. They are blessed by God. That is equivalent language for what Peter called chosen, elect, beloved by God, a people purchased by God, by Christ for God's own possession. For you new believers in our midst, you have joined the company of the rest of us who have embraced God's Messiah. And as I said, that is no small thing. That is God's doing. We are among the blessed, not because of our own worth, merit,



strength, pride, intellect, power. We're among the blessed because we have been specially and sovereignly favored by God. And that's the reason.

None of this is by your own merit. We don't do this, deserve any of this favor, which the baptisms this morning testified to. You can hear in all those baptisms a wandering and a darkness and a shame and a sadness until God redeemed. All this is God's doing. "For by grace you've been saved through faith. It's not of your own selves, it's not of your own doing; it's the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast in self." It's not a matter of merit, not a matter of intellect, strength, or human wisdom. It's a matter of divine grace.

So listen, if we embrace Jesus as God's Messiah, if we are not offended by, by him, it is because God has favored us. For others who are not so favored and blessed by God, they all get Jesus wrong. Peter, in contrast to the wrong opinion of many in his day, he made the good confession, Matthew 16:16. He said of Jesus, you're not just like Elijah or one of the prophets or even John the Baptist raised from the dead. You're not like any

of that. You're something completely different. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Did Jesus turned around and say, oh, Peter, wow! Good job.

No, he didn't look at Peter and commend Peter. He gave glory to God. "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." Even your own flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, "but my Father who is in heaven." Jesus was constantly encouraging his disciples that way. Later on he told them on the eve of his crucifixion, John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

Beloved, new believer and old alike, let that thought comfort you. Let that truth fill your heart with joy, encouragement, and strong confidence. The fact that you're not offended by Christ, along with the rest of the unbelieving world, the fact that you embrace Jesus as God's Messiah in contradistinction from the rest of the unbelieving world, that is not your own doing. Rather, it is the gracious will of God. It's not up to you and it's up to God. And that means he will hold you fast.

Remember that when you're down and discouraged. Remember that when your sins come back to haunt you. Remember that when the evil one comes to tempt you, entices you into sin and you fail yet again. And then that evil one becomes not just your enticer and your tempter, but also your accuser. oh, look at you. You belong to Christ? Sure you do, you hypocrite! You just look at him and say, I am what I am by the grace of God. God chose me.

You belong to him because you have embraced his son the Messiah. He is your king because God has willed it. And God has affected it. Jude assures us the same way. He speaks of the one who is able to keep you from stumbling, to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, that one is the only God, our Savior and through Jesus Christ our Lord, to him belongs glory and majesty and dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Listen, if that all-powerful, high, and majestic, if that glorious one chose you, do you think he'll ever let you go? "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." We're not

offended by Christ. He's not a stumbling block to us. We embrace him, we love him. That is God's doing. Not only are we unashamed of Christ, we boast in him. And I'd encourage you, new believer and old believer alike, but you new believers boast of Christ. Get used to boasting in Christ. Speak to Christ, speak of Christ to others, be verbal about that. Be unapologetic about that. Be bold, humble, but bold in your testimony of what God has done. Get used to speaking openly about him. It pleases God for you to honor his Son publicly. You know why? Because God honored his own son publicly, lifted him high on a cross.

That leads us to a second word of comfort and encouragement from our Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who embrace Jesus as God's Messiah, we've lined up under the King, God set in place to rule a kingdom and that means that we can also be encouraged, point two, we can be encouraged that we belong to God's kingdom. Point number two, we belong to God's kingdom. Go back to Luke 7, verse 28. You'll see this second word of encouragement to new believers. After teaching the crowds about John the Baptist in Luke 7:24-28, Jesus has here informed their consciences about the significance of John the Baptist. He has elevated their

sense of accountability that they have been listening to none other than a genuine prophet of God.

And the Lord turns to comfort his people again in verse 28. And he tells them a remarkable thing. He says, "I tell you after everything I've said about John's greatness, that among those born of women, none is greater than John. And yet, the one who is least in the kingdom of God, greater than he." What a powerful word of encouragement, especially as you come to understand this biblical concept of the kingdom of God. Jesus said that he was sent for the purpose of preaching the kingdom of God, Luke 4:43.

In the first beatitude, Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God." That is the King of the kingdom speaking. He's giving encouragement to the subjects of his kingdom. "Blessed are you who are poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of God." Kingdom refers to a place ruled by a king. You're like, Duh. Yes, that's right. It's that simple. A kingdom is a sphere of dominion. A kingdom is ruled by an apostle monarch called a king and this sphere, this place of

dominion that we're talking about here is God's kingdom. He's the one in charge. He's the King. He's absolutely sovereign in the exercise of his authority and his dominion. That's the kingdom of God.

We read about kings and kingdoms throughout the Bible, all the way from Genesis. The most prominent theme running through Genesis to Revelation, among all the kings in the kingdoms in the world, is that there is one kingdom, a coming kingdom of God that is going to supplant all human kingdoms. God's Messiah is going to be King of kings and Lord of lords. It may have been quite a big thing to belong to the kingdom of Assyria, as Assyria's marching through the ancient world and impaling its enemies on poles and putting them up for display, that it would make everybody fear. To carry the carrying card of the Assyrian kingdom means your something big.

It may have been some big thing to belong to the kingdom of Babylon or Persia or Greece, or to be a citizen of Rome. Delight. All those kingdoms have passed away. They're relics of human history. They're just interesting for us to study now, but

no fear. Our own citizenship in this wonderful country of ours with so much privilege and opportunity is one day going to become a dim fact of history as well.

But we, beloved, belong to God's kingdom. We have a different citizenship card. Not a Green Card, mind you, full-fledged citizenship. This is an eternal kingdom we belong to ruled by the eternal Son of God. It's a kingdom that's been revealed throughout Scripture as early as Exodus, but in Daniel 7:14, we find a very clear word of revelation about this kingdom. There was a one like a Son of Man, that is the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah and he approached the one who was seated on the throne, the Ancient of Days. This is majestic vision that's given to Daniel.

And he sees, as "To him, to the one like the Son of Man, is given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." In that last section there, it's parallel after parallel emphasizing permanency. That

kingdom is going to last; nothing will diminish its glory. Nothing can stand against it. And in Daniel 7:18, we read, get this, this is you and me, "The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever."

That's us, beloved. We belong to God's kingdom. We're ruled by Christ. So by the grace of God, we've embraced Jesus Christ as God's Messiah. We've been allowed to become citizens of his kingdom and that is what Paul also rejoiced in, though he had a Roman citizenship by natural birth, quite a remarkable privilege in his day, he didn't rejoice in that. He rejoiced in another kingdom. He told the Philippians, many of them citizens of Rome, he said, "But our citizenship is in heaven, from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him, even to subject all things to himself."

There will come a day, Isaiah 65, Revelation 19, 20, 21, 22, 1 Thessalonians, you can go through all of Scripture and see this. There will come a day when the kingdom of God will overtake the

earth, when it will irradiate all rule, all authority and drive all disobedient from the earth. All rebellion will be crushed. All rebel forces will be subdued. All of them overwhelmed by the power of the sovereign king. But for now, the kingdom of God has been inaugurated by the King Messiah, Jesus and it exists in force, in reality, wherever God is obeyed.

That kingdom has been inaugurated by Christ and, as Jesus says in Luke 17:21, "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you," or another way to translate it is, "The kingdom of God is in you." In other words, the place where God rules and reigns right now until Christ comes again, a second time to subdue all, where God is ruling and reigning now in the realm in which he is honored as God, the sphere in which he is praised and thanked with the worship that is due is majesty is here. It's in here. It's in the hearts of his people. It's in the corporate praises of his churches.

We're a kingdom of citizens. We follow a heavenly constitution. We bow before a heavenly king. And our king is the only king whose dominion will last forever and forever and ever. He's the

only king who is worthy of all worship because from God above, he has received, according to Revelation 5:12, "All power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." God sent his chosen King, unlike any other king I've ever read about, God sent his chosen king to die before he reigned, to sacrifice before he rules, to humble himself before he is exalted.

God sent his Messiah to earth to die for his subjects and now he sends his spirit to regenerate, convert and adopt. In love, in affection, God converts rebels into citizens. He turns enemies into friends. He makes strangers his adopted sons and daughters. New believer, old believer, but new believer, think about that. Your king died for you, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." When Jesus says to us, Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Blessed are you who are chosen by God, for yours is the kingdom."

By God's grace, we've embraced his Messiah. By God's grace, we now belong to his kingdom and because of that, there's a third

word of encouragement. It wouldn't make sense without the submission and obedience to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. But now that we've embraced Christ and we belong to God's kingdom, there is a third word of encouragement that now makes sense.

Number three, we walk in God's wisdom. We walk in God's wisdom. For those who belong to the kingdom of God, Luke 8:10, they are privileged, blessed by God because Jesus says, "To you has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God." So once you bow in worship in repentance and faith and bow and worship before Christ, and you are now a subject of that kingdom, now all the treasures of the kingdom come rolling out to you. You know the secrets of the kingdom of God. This is not gnostic higher knowledge kept from some in this room and open to others.

This is the word *mysterion*. This is talking about the hidden things of God that were hidden by God by his sovereign designed, but now in Christ, all revealed to those who know him. All revealed to those who worship Christ. Everything open in Christ as the fullness of wisdom and knowledge and it's all open to us.

But the noncitizens, for those who are aliens and strangers, for those who are Green Card carriers who come into our midst, but then leave, they're outside the kingdom. And they remain ignorant. And they wander in darkness. We want to go rescue them and bring them into the kingdom.

But those who receive the knowledge of the kingdom, they've been enlightened by God's grace. It's through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit that they understand the truth of God, they understand the mind of God. God teaches them to walk in knowledge and this is the very essence of wisdom. This is the final word of encouragement, Luke 7:35. We remember in that section, Luke 7:29-35, that Jesus winnowed the crowds, he separated wheat from chaff, he drew a dividing line down the middle of humanity, and he separated those who humbled themselves in obedience from those who elevated themselves in their arrogance and rebellion.

And to the humble, to the submissive and obedient, to those who justified God by their obedience and in their obedience, the Lord comforts them in verse 35 saying this, "Yet wisdom," in

contrast to the rejection, "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." There are the children in the marketplace, frivolous, sitting doing nothing, criticizing at every turn and then there are the wisdom of, or the children of wisdom, as subjects of God's chosen Messiah, as citizens of God's eternal kingdom, there has been, in Christ, in his apostles, a veritable avalanche of truth poured out in the New Testament.

By God's grace, we have access, can understand, and apprehend this truth. God has given us, as I said, the Holy Spirit as in indwelling, resident truth teacher. And he illuminates God's Word to us. He opens our eyes to it. He opens our ears. He softens our heart to it. And then he empowers us to walk in obedience to that wisdom. It's incredible truth. We're the only people on earth that have this and can walk in it. It can shape our lives.

Turn ahead to the tenth chapter of Luke and notice what Jesus said in the presence of his disciples. He breaks out, Jesus does, in verse 21, in this Spirit-inspired praise. And this is what Jesus says. He says, "In that same hour he," Jesus,

"rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and he said, 'I thank you, father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows who the son is except the father or who the father is except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him.'"

Do you know you are what you are because Jesus had your name in mind, and he chose to reveal himself to you? He chose to reveal the father to you by name. It's no wonder Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit that the father's been pleased to show us everything. Look at verse 23, "Turning to the disciples, Jesus said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see? For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.'"

So beloved, don't ever take this for granted? God has been well-pleased to reveal hidden things to you, things that many prophets and kings desire to see. They don't see it. They didn't

see it, but you do. You've been chosen by God for such an incredible privilege. You may think of yourself, Ah, I'm not that smart. I only went so far with my education. I struggle to make sense of many high and lofty things. Oh, beloved, saint, believer, your eyes have been made to see while the educated remain blind. Your ears have been opened to true wisdom where the wise of this world remain deaf and they go to their graves knowing nothing. You've received from God a heart to perceive, to understand, to receive the things of God. It is not natural in your fallen condition. It is the miraculous grace of God in your life.

Now I want you to return over to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 30. This is going to bring us full circle to where we started in 1 Corinthians 1. Because we are by God's grace not offended by Christ, Luke 7:23, we've become citizens of God's kingdom, which conveys upon us such massive privileges that even the prophets, of John the Baptist stature, they didn't receive it, Luke 7:28. By God's grace, we've been granted the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

And we're able to see and understand and rejoice and walk in that wisdom and for that reason, when we hear the preaching of Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 1:23, we weren't scandalized like the Jews. We didn't scorn it as folly like the Gentiles. Rather, we considered the message of the cross, the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified, we counted that message, 1 Corinthians 1:24, "To be Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."

And therefore, look at verses 30-31, because of God, you are in Christ Jesus, "Who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" That is how wisdom is justified by all of her children. As wisdom's children, that is us, folks, as we boast in the Lord, as we boast in his wisdom, as we boast in his power unto righteousness.

Turn the page now to chapter 2. Look at verse 6. "Yet among the mature, we impart wisdom. It's not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed from before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age

understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

By God’s grace, we understand more than the wisest men of any age. Plato and Aristotle, Copernicus and Galileo, Einstein, Steven Hawking, none of them understood the wisdom of God. Outside the grace of God, Caesar of Augustus, Marcus Aurelius, Charlemagne, Richard the First, Winston Churchill, and for us, Ronald Reagan. None of them understood the wisdom of God either. Paul and the apostles have imparted to us through what’s been written in the New Testament, a secret hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. That is an incredible privilege.

Keep reading. “But as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined,’” some people think that that’s just referring to heaven. Can I tell you that that’s not just heaven? “What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor entered into the heart of man,” yes heavenly things. But that is talking about apostolic doctrine. That’s the whole of the New Testament that’s in those words right there. And no eye saw that

coming. No ear heard of its telling. It never entered the heart of man to crucify the Lord of glory, "What God has prepared for those who love him, these things God revealed to us," that is the apostles, "through the Spirit."

Again, by the Holy Spirit, God revealed to his apostles and prophets in the New Testament what no human being could ever have imagined and this is wisdom that comes from the depths of the infinite all-knowing God, who is endless. Look at verse 10, "For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God, the *bathos* of God. For who knows a person's thoughts, except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we've received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."

That is divine revelation. It's not human intellect. It's not human intuition. It's not human discovery. This is wisdom from the very *bathos* of God. And it's all ours. It's all ours to learn from, to read, to rejoice in, and then to put on display

as we walk in it. Like Paul told the Philippians, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise." Don't walk as you did in your ignorance. Don't just sit still and watch TV like all the dying corpses of this world. Walk. Get up and walk as wise. "Make the best use of the time." Why? "Because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

By walking in the truths we've received from God's Word, by walking in wisdom, we justify God's wisdom. We fulfill what God has chosen us to be. That's back to 1 Peter 2:9, "You're a chosen race." You're different. You're no longer of Adam's race. You're of Christ's race. "You're a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood," bringing people to God. You're a holy nation, you are a people that's marked out, set apart, defined by holiness. Why? So you can sit still and keep it to yourself? No. "That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Beloved, all of you who have come to Christ recently, join with the rest of us, all of us together have joined a people of

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immense provide, spanning the ages, covering the globe. God's amazing, electing, redeeming, reconciling grace has caused us to embrace the Messiah and we boast in him. We now belong to God's eternal kingdom and we're citizens of heaven. We're privileged to walk in God's eternal wisdom so that we live very differently from the rest of the world. And for us, the things of this world have grown strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Amen.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that you have privileged us. You have favored us. You have graced us to make us a part of your people, a people for your own possession, that we may proclaim your excellencies. We thank you that we embrace Jesus Christ as our King and Lord and Messiah. He's our Savior. We thank you that we belong to your kingdom as full-fledged citizens, and not just citizens in a, in a secular way, but in an intimate way we are members of your family by adoption.

We're not just subjects of the King; we're children of the King. We thank you that we have received your wisdom that we may walk in it. And we ask that by the same power you use to save us and



redeem us from our sins, we ask that that same power would energize us to walk in obedience to your truth. We do not want our lives to be an affront to you. We do not want our lives to be a lying testimony about your power and grace. So please work within us, encourage us, strengthen us.

And I pray for all the new believers in our midst, those who are baptized today, and many others besides have been baptized here or other places, recently joined our church. We just ask for their sanctification. We ask for their steadfastness. We ask for their deep anchoring and rooting and grace and knowledge in Jesus Christ. And I pray for all the older believers in our midst, that you would allow none to sit still while there is a duty to disciple. Help them to get up and to engage in that duty and that responsibility and find what great joy it is to see others grow. We pray that you would unite our hearts together in love as we give ourselves to one another for mutual edification and conformity to Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.