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The Parables of Jesus - Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you that you are in our lives. We thank you for that incredible gift of the presence of your Holy Spirit. And Lord, today again we are looking at some material that might be difficult to hear and again, once again we plead for the presence of your Holy Spirit, we plead for you to accompany us, come alongside us and give us the ability to look into your word and to again make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are studying the parables of Jesus and what Jesus did was he took a commonly understood earthly stories like sowing seeds or sowing weeds in a wheat field and he applied them to spiritual truths to make them absolutely simple to understand. Well, the problem was the result for many of us hearers was anything but simple understanding. In fact many, if not most, of his hearers had no idea what he was talking about. Jesus told seven simple parables in Matthew 13 and the scripture itself states that many of his hearers including his disciples, they were absolutely mystified

by his sudden change in his teaching style. In fact the scripture often details how Jesus's disciples, they would take him aside and they'd say "Why are you doing this?" Jesus had never spoken like that before. It marked a huge difference in the way Jesus taught and because it has implications for us even today, it's important to understand exactly what was taking place.

We learned last time that Jesus began speaking in parables as a judgment against the nation of Israel and its leadership. See, God had chosen to rule this world through a series of mediators beginning all the way at the very start in Genesis with Adam and Eve. They rejected the dominion that God had offered them by eating the forbidden fruit, turned the kingdom over to God's enemy, Satan. And what followed in the history of Israel is one long tragic march through mediator after mediator, and in each case we see Israel repeatedly rejecting God's rule through these men. And finally we see the arrival of the ultimate mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. God himself takes on flesh to bridge the chasm between God and his creation and Jesus himself in one of his parables describes man's reaction to Jesus as Lord. He describes it this way in *Luke 19: But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We do not want this man to reign over us."* God summed up man's reaction saying in *John 3:19: "And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness*

rather than the light because their works were evil." I said last time that the evil work that was the final straw in terms of Israel rejecting the ultimate mediator was what took place when Jesus cast a demon out of a man who had been made blind and mute. Instead of praise, it provoked this jealous outburst by the Pharisees as the demon was ousted by Jesus. Matthew 12 says: All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." Well, this final wicked statement by them wound up filling up the cup of God's wrath to overflowing, and this was Jesus's response. He said: Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

Well, the kingdom had indeed come and the Pharisees had clearly and specifically rejected it. Not once, not twice but over and over and over again, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit. And Jesus just pointed out, they were committing the unpardonable sin. So from that moment forward Jesus changes his teaching style and begins to speak in parables that oftentimes leaves his hearers mystified, it leaves them confused. But understand, this is not something that Jesus did in a fit of pique. This was a judgment that had taken centuries to make. And Jesus made that judgment clear in his response to his disciples' bewilderment that he's now speaking in riddles. This is what he said to them, he said: *"This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."* So Jesus is explaining to his disciples and he's explaining that now the Pharisees are the ones who are receiving a curse and the disciples are going to receive a privilege, a principle and a pronouncement concerning how they were to present the gospel.

This is what we spoke about last time. The privilege was that the mediatorial rule of God's kingdom was going to be taken away from the Pharisees, from the religious leaders of Israel, and it was going to be given to tax collectors and fishermen, men who made up the very first church. The principle had to do with what happens when you repeatedly reject biblical truth. It was a crucial piece of information that told the disciples how the kingdom responds to those who reject it. Again Jesus explains that in the very same paragraph. In *Matthew 13:12* it says: *"For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* Simply put, it means the ability to discern truth grows or shrinks depending on how you receive truth. The more you embrace truth, the more your capacity for truth increases. Whoever has will be given more. Conversely, the more you reject truth, the more your capacity for truth will shrink. *"But as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away."* What God is saying here is that our capacity to see and hear truth is fluid, I mean, that is it changes. Spiritually speaking, that's exactly how God described the eyes and ears of those who see and hear truth and reject it. They don't just shut out the truth, much, much worse is they shut down the ability to perceive truth. I mentioned the apostle Paul as an example. And Paul repeatedly denied truth over and over again, in fact he persecuted the truth and his repeated denials of

the truth of the gospel had left his ability to perceive truth in a very sorry state and so what do we see? We see God able to overcome that by sending Saul of Tarsus who became Paul by sending Saul of Tarsus a light that was so powerful it literally knocked him off his horse and blinded him for three days. Well, the principle is this: Reject the spiritual truths of the gospel and you will grow progressively blind and deaf. And that's what we see happening to the Pharisees. Eventually you get to a place when you will attribute the very miracles of God to acts of Satan. And then finally Jesus makes a pronouncement. He makes a pronouncement of profound spiritual blindness that comes to those who repeatedly reject the truth. He said: *"This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* He says rejecting truth eventually cause eyes to no longer see and ears to no longer hear. And what Jesus is describing is the practical outworking of the unforgivable sin. I mean the Pharisees clearly heard with their own ears a man who was previously incapable of speaking. They heard but they didn't understand. They also saw with their own eyes that this man previously blind could now see and yet as Christ had promised, they saw that. They just couldn't perceive it. And their perception was now permanently altered and incapable of receiving truth. I mean think about it, a blind and mute man now seeing and speaking did absolutely nothing to move them towards faith, because seeing

they would not see and hearing they would not hear. It's precisely what happens when anyone commits an unpardonable sin. And Jesus illustrated exactly how this operates in yet another confrontation that he had over yet another blind man. This time it was a man blind from birth. He was healed by Jesus and the Pharisees' response was to throw the guy out of the temple. Jesus' response to the Pharisees illustrates exactly what he meant when he pronounced them blind. This is what he said in *John 9*, it says: *Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."* You see, the Pharisees' blindness was not some kind of congenital condition they were not responsible for, rather it was this willful blindness that they brought on themselves by repeatedly rejecting the light of truth. Their response proved how dreadful Jesus' pronouncement actually was. And it was never about a one-time utterance that forever damns you. Instead it's about an attitude that refuses repeatedly to respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction. Eventually that blindness becomes permanent and that sin becomes unforgivable. John's gospel tells us it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. And speaking against that Spirit continuously renders any sin whatsoever

unforgivable because it cuts off the conviction that leads us to seek forgiveness in the first place. And whether it's crucifying the son of God or stealing a paper clip, the results are exactly the same. You cannot be forgiven for a sin you will not acknowledge or confess. So that sin, I mean any sin, for that matter, can become unforgivable.

Now there's a reason why I'm trying to drive that point home. It's because we have a situation that has been unfolding over the last few years, and it's been targeted by the enemy specifically at those with same-sex attractions. And this is why it is so crucial to understand why churches that have come out in favor of the LGBTQ life-style are doing such a drastic disservice to their flocks. This is specifically why. Homosexuality is clearly taught by scripture to be a sinful behavior. *Romans 1:26* says: *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another. Men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.* Well, sad to say, many churches today are insisting that scripture does not mean what it says. And you add to that *1 Corinthians 6* which says: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither*

the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. God has a list here of nine different sins of which homosexuality is but one. And I look at that list and I realize I've been guilty in my life of many if not most of those other sins, and yet from the very start, God's Holy Spirit has been systematically rooting them out of my life by changing my heart. I mean sins that I used to enjoy as a pagan I now find displeasing to God and repulsive to me. And here's why it's so important to understand if you are one of God's sheep, then God's Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside you. You are literally a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that spirit is inside you and it's constantly working to shape and mold you into the image of Jesus Christ. And to that end, the Spirit works to convict us of sin. I mean Jesus told us that was the job of the Holy Spirit who is referred to as the helper in John 16. He says: Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Well, God's Holy Spirit convicted me of my sin the way he always does. He brought me to a place where I agreed with God that my sin was sin and that it had to go. I've mentioned it many times before but it bears repeating. This is how the process works. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

What is crucial to this process is understanding what God means by that word "confess." It's a word that's made up of two Greek words, the word "homo" which means "same" and the word "logeō" which means "to speak," and together those words mean "to same speak." It simply means to be on the same wavelength, to be in agreement, to be speaking the same language. And so "to confess" means that you are agreeing with God's Holy Spirit when he's convicting you of a particular sin that you're confessing, whether it's sexual immorality or idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, greed, theft, drunkenness, reviling or swindling, among many others, that conviction begins the moment you become a believer in Jesus Christ. When that happens, God's Spirit enters into you and he begins house cleaning immediately. *1 Corinthians 6:19* says: *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* describes this process of the Holy

Spirit cleaning house. He describes it very well. It says this: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you're not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of -- throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself."

See, you and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, are God's own house, and God's Holy Spirit is at work constantly rooting out our sin and what is uniquely awful about so many professing Christian churches today is that they are quite happy to leave all of those sins we discussed on the level of sinful with but one exception, and that's the sin of homosexuality. It has been dropped from the list of sinful behaviors to now be considered by some a birthright or a genetic proclivity or even a spiritual gift. The bottom line is this: Homosexuality is not the unforgivable sin but it is a sin, and denying it renders the gospel ineffective and unimportant. The

good news that Christ's death on the cross forgives sins is neither good nor news for someone newly convinced that his or her sin has no moral consequences. And what that effectively does is turn a thoroughly forgivable sin like homosexuality into an unforgivable sin, not because of the nature of the sin itself but because it's no longer considered something that needs confession and repentance. Now, am I suggesting that you need to remember each and every sin and confess it or else you, too, are going to be guilty of some unforgivable sin? Well, the answer is no, absolutely not. I mean God knows that we are such sinful creatures that we oftentimes don't even remember or realize our sin. In fact in the Old Testament there was even a sacrifice set aside for sins that we don't realize. *Leviticus 4* says: *"If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering."* The psalmist himself says: *Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.* So we're not talking about sins committed unintentionally here, God in Christ will forgive them. What we are talking about are sins no longer considered sinful. Part of being a believer in Christ is that the

Holy Spirit is constantly at work convicting you. But what if instead you're surrounded by people convincing you that it's not the Holy Spirit who's convicting you and that your guilt is somehow manufactured by people who are oppressive or outdated or have this incredibly narrow view of God's love? Well, such is the case in many Christian churches today. And what is in my view a stunning irony, we find that the very people who claim to be loving and caring for the LGBTQ community are in fact putting them gravely into a position where they no longer feel the need to seek forgiveness for a sin that's no longer sinful. And just like with abortion actually it was the supreme court that led the way. You see, this moral dam actually broke open in 2015 when the supreme court legalized same-sex marriage. The day that happened homosexuality went from the status of a serious sin to a civil right. And since then our culture has become intent on rewriting scripture as to what is sinful and what is not. I think it goes without saying that we are witnessing a sea change in attitudes about this particular sin.

Ed Shaw is a celibate gay Christian. He's the author of the book *Same Sex Attraction in the Church*. This is what he says. He says: "Our legal systems -- once used to persecute the gay community -- are now used to prosecute Christians who refuse services to gay customers. The fear of coming out as an evangelical Christian in

the workplace today is perhaps similar to the fear of coming out as gay to colleagues a generation ago. Just think about that. Think about how much things have changed. Dictionaries are changing definitions of the words like 'marriage' and schools are asking parents to indicate their child's preferred gender identity. More and more young people talk of a fluidity in their experience of gender and sexuality. It's important for us to recognize and articulate that not all the changes have been bad. The past is not necessarily a better country. Yet we also must recognize that it's not good that Scripture's teaching on gender, sexuality, and marriage has been largely rejected by Western society -- and by increasing numbers within the church. We desperately need to call people back to God's life-giving Word."

Statistics back up Mr. Shaw's point. In 2004, the Pew Research company began polling attitudes on same-sex marriage and at that time the American population was 61 percent opposed with 30 percent approving. Fast forward 15 years, the exact script has flipped 100 percent. Now 61 percent approve and 30 percent oppose. Pew Research goes on to say: "About two-thirds of white mainline Protestants (66%) now support same-sex marriage, as do similar shares of Catholics (61%). Support for same-sex marriage among white evangelical Protestants remains lower than it is among other religious groups. However, the share of white evangelical

Protestants who support same-sex marriage has grown from 11% in 2004 to 29% today." That's 163 percent increase! That's almost one in three today. And can I tell you what I believe has driven much of that increase? I think it's silent pulpits. I think that's why we're seeing this. Or worse yet, pulpits that have abandoned all pretext that homosexuality is contrary to God's plan and now shout their support for it. I mean add to that a media culture that is 100 percent committed to normalizing homosexual behavior as well.

Many of you are familiar with the cartoon Arthur, PBS has been running the children's cartoon for many, many years. I think we have an image of it. I don't know if we have that, if you put that up. You're familiar with that. Well, they decided to break precedents this year and that -- actually that image shows you that -- they decided to show one of Arthur's teachers having a same-sex wedding ceremony. Now you and I know that cartoons are obviously designed to deliver a message to children. And that this is now a profoundly acceptable social behavior is clearly the message that they want delivered. Well, the head of public broadcasting for the state of Alabama refused to air the cartoon. But not to worry, because there's going to be a public showing of Arthur's teacher's same-sex marriage put on by a church. A Fox news story stated: "For those unable to watch the episode on

television, the First United Methodist Church in Birmingham decided to throw a wedding party to commemorate the episode. Their 'reception' on June 15 will feature a free screening of the episode with a wedding cake and sparkling apple juice according to AL.com. The church, in coordination with Sidewalk Film Festival and Shout LGBTQ Film Festival, plans to host the party and air the episode because 'weddings take places at churches all the time.' (The church) frequently communicates to the community that they are an 'open place for all,' and I think this event reflects that statement,' Rachel Morgan, creative director for both festivals, said, noting she believes the church 'seems like a perfect venue for the cartoon in my opinion.'"

See, homosexuality has now gone from sinful to celebrated. Imagine what that does to a person legitimately struggling with same-sex attraction who's trying to heed the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. And there are many of those folks today and they are, in my book, heroes. But almost to a person they lament how deeply the church has failed them.

Emily Hallock is a member of the Bruderhof community. Her dad was a pastor who died of AIDS, having succumbed to his same-sex attraction. And in an article entitled "*The Powerful Witness of Same-Sex Attracted Christians*," she writes this: "He couldn't

shake his same-sex attraction. He knew God's commands; he knew there would be no blessing on a parallel gay life-style, but he was unable to share his burden or ask for help. Eventually, all alone, he gave in to temptation. The churches failed my dad then, and they are failing people like him now, but it doesn't have to be that way. I found Ed Shaw's book *The Plausibility Problem* a great help in this regard. Shaw, a celibate, same-sex attracted pastor, challenges churches on their lack of support for same-sex attracted Christians. All of us, he says, are subject to temptations, and all of us need help to overcome them. All Christians need the support of a church family to follow Jesus, but because many churches either refuse to discuss same-sex attraction for fear of being labeled homophobic, or encourage same-sex attracted people to live a gay lifestyle in the same spirit of compromise, most same-sex attracted Christians don't get the support they need. Rather than helping him, Shaw says, churches make his life difficult by being unclear, even hypocritical, about a sin like divorce and remarriage, and by not clarifying the sacrifices required for true discipleship. He writes of what he calls 'kitchen floor moments,' when he feels acutely the sacrifices of the stand he is taking. 'What will help me get up off the kitchen floor is seeing other Christians sacrifice short-term happiness out of obedience to God's word. I'm most encouraged to obey what God says about sex by the costly obedience I see other Christians make. A good friend has

been willing to sacrifice his professional reputation to take a stand for truth. Another friend persevered in a marriage nearly everyone else would have walked away from -- because he knows God hates divorce. All of them are the sort of people who have most made me feel the possibility of the life that I'm living, and I praise God for them.' Such shared sacrifices are crucial to reinforcing the idea that the church is a place of welcome to same-sex attracted disciples."

Do you hear what Ed Shaw is saying here? What he's saying is the church has an absolutely critical role to play here. What he's saying is that the community means everything to people who are struggling with sin but particularly those who are struggling with same-sex attraction. See, the church is not a building, it's a community, it's a community of people who are committed to helping each other grow. And when they see others in our community making the hard choices that come with genuine faith, then they, too, are encouraged to undertake the sacrifice of resisting same-sex attraction.

Emily Hallock goes on to say this: "It's not just Ed Shaw and my dad; there are others who have made this sacrifice, too. Sam Allberry (*Is God Antigay?*)" -- these are books and articles these folks have written -- "Sam Allberry and Wesley Hill (*Washed and*

Waiting) are exclusively same-sex attracted Christians for whom celibacy is the only option to stay faithful to God's commands. Rosaria Butterfield (*The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*), on the other hand, was able to renounce her lesbian lifestyle to marry and adopt children in the church. All of them, out of love to Jesus, put God first and had the courage to publish their stories. People with same-sex attraction who want to follow Jesus may be among the most important witnesses of our time. They are taking a brave, uncompromising stand for the gospel that requires great personal sacrifice. They are asking the church to stand together with them. The church needs to be there for people like my dad, and for each one of us. We are all sinners, whether we are heterosexual or same-sex attracted. We cannot single out specific sins or certain individuals for condemnation, because the truth for everyone is that when we put Jesus before our self-interests, all can be redeemed."

Would that the church would stand in agreement with that statement, but in many cases, she just refuses. I mean in my view, God is going to hold the shepherds of those flocks responsible for minimizing or negating the convicting work of the Holy Spirit on those who are struggling with homosexuality. I'm struck by the prophetic message that God gave in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel about shepherds who refuse to protect their sheep. This is

what he said. He said: *"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness."* I am so grateful that God is sovereign over all things and he's not cowed, he's not frustrated by shepherds who refuse to do their job. He says he's going to seek out and rescue those sheep who have been falsely led astray by shepherds who refuse to call sin sin. And we've just heard evidence that he's doing just that.

So I want to be clear to anyone in this church who is struggling with the sin of homosexuality, and I want you to know that it is a

sin just like any other sin and that this church is made up of sinners. And we are here, all of us, sinners saved by grace. And so if you struggle with this sin, we will struggle with you. *Galatians 6* says: *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.* Well, if anyone thought they were something when they were actually nothing, it was the Pharisees who accused Christ of removing demons by the power of Satan. And the reason why Jesus regarded that action as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and therefore unforgivable was not what they said but what they did, how they reacted to a miracle. A blind, mute man now fully restored was God's Holy Spirit blasting light right into the Pharisees' faces. And they looked directly into the face of a man that Jesus had freed from Satan and said it was Satan himself who had worked this miracle through Jesus. They made themselves blind and deaf to God himself and that was the action that was unforgivable.

Now you might not know anyone who is suffering from same-sex attraction, but I can guarantee you, you and I know plenty of people who are suffering from not knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

You see, in a very real sense the unforgivable sin is the reason why any and every person who doesn't know Christ is going to experience an eternal judgment for sin. I mean if the one sin that God says he will not forgive is the ongoing refusal to heed the Holy Spirit, then every single person who has refused to heed the call of the gospel is guilty of that particular sin. And that only -- that doesn't only include folks who are actively hostile to the gospel, it includes my lovely neighbor who wants to help me out all the time, the person that you find yourself chatting with at the park, your friends, your neighbors, your associates, your colleagues, it's anyone who refuses to heed the call of the gospel. That's the unforgivable sin.

So what do we do with this? Well, first of all we have to recognize the culture that God has placed us in. I mean the vast majority of our culture in the United States is Christianized. I mean we're not the Middle East, we're not China or India where the gospel is still somewhat rare, we've got gospel radio, gospel TV, a church on every corner, we've got Wal-Mart touting the latest evangelical best seller. We are awash in the gospel. But we are set in a culture that hardly hears and closes its eyes. So how do we bring this culture the gospel? I mean if ears are almost deaf and eyes are almost blind, does that mean we have to shine the truth that much brighter and shout the truth that much louder in

order to be seen and heard? I don't think so. I think our task in spreading the gospel is not to be brighter or louder, it is to be wiser. *Proverbs 11:30* says: *He who wins souls is wise.* Winning souls means penetrating blind eyes and deaf ears, the kind of eyes and ears that mark this culture. So we need wisdom. So we ask: Where do you find this wisdom? Where do we find the ability to open eyes and unstop ears? Where does the spiritual power to make the gospel make sense come from? Well, it comes from prayer. *James 1* says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* You see, winning souls is really not about cleverness, it's not about skill, it's not about technique, it's about wisdom. It's about seeing the big picture where God sovereignly saves and we see ourselves as the stewards of his mysteries. And the way we get that wisdom is through prayer.

Listen to what Charles Spurgeon had to say about winning souls. He says this: "How do we win souls then? Why, the word 'win' has a better meaning by far. It is used in warfare. Warriors win cities and provinces. Now, to win a soul, is a much more difficult thing than to win a city. Observe the earnest soul winner at his work: How cautiously he seeks his great captain's directions to know when to hang out the white flag, to invite the heart to surrender to the sweet love of the dying Savior: When, at the proper time to hang

out the black flag of threatening, showing that if grace be not received, judgment will surely follow: And when to unfurl, with dread reluctance, the red flag of the terrors of God against aberrant, impenitent souls."

So the question we have to ask ourselves is do we know when to speak of the love of God or the fear of God? Do we know when to raise the white, black or red flags? I mean there are people that I come in contact with that are desperate to know that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. I mean perhaps they're trapped in systems of thought that claimed that heaven is something that you work at or for, perhaps they sense deep down that they'll never be good enough and we are privileged to show them the white flag, to show them a Savior who loved them enough to die for them who they can surrender to. Then there are those who genuinely believe that their goodness is good enough. We have the privilege of pointing them to the black flag, to a perfect God with a perfect demand for absolutely holiness, a demand that only Jesus could meet, one that he met at the cross, perfectly paying a debt we could never pay. And sometimes we are called on to run up the red flag of God's judgment on sin, to point out that God is not some benevolent marshmallow, that he is a consuming fire and that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. I can tell you right off the bat, I don't have the wisdom to do that. I

don't have it in me. I simply do not. But God does. And he delights in equipping us if we ask him. If we ask the "Great Captain's" direction. To quote Ravi Zacharias, he says: "Outside of the Cross of Jesus Christ, there is no hope in this world. That Cross and resurrection at the core of the Gospel is the only hope for humanity. Wherever you go, ask God for wisdom on how to get that gospel in, even in the toughest situations of life."

I won't deny that sharing the gospel with same-sex attracted people is profoundly more difficult now than it was only a decade ago, and I lay the blame for that at the foot of culture and also at the foot of the church, but I also thank God that what is impossible with men is possible with God, and that gives me hope that through prayer I can find the wisdom necessary to share the gospel with whoever Jesus brings into my life, whether LGBTQ or straight, because more than anything, every one of them need Jesus. I mean Jesus grew his kingdom by speaking in parables. And to some it was the truth simplified, to others these were completely unsolvable riddles. It was a privilege to understand what he was talking about and Jesus tells us we've been privileged with the truth and not with the riddles and along with that privilege comes responsibility. God's principle is that truth rejected yields callused hearts that only see the parables' riddles. His pronouncement is that those hearts will produce eyes that are

closed and ears that can't hear. But here's the bottom line: They are our mission field. And so, Lord, if ever we needed wisdom, we need it now. Let's pray.

Father, I just again thank you for your truth. You have said so many times, Lord, my people perish for lack of vision and that vision is your word, that vision is the truth, something that is rock solid, something that doesn't shift and change with the culture. Lord, we are in the midst of a culture that is swirling and changing at an incredibly rapid pace, and we confess that we don't now how to do this, we don't have the wisdom that is necessary to address those people who are caught up in this culture, who have eyes that don't see and ears that don't hear. So we pray that you would give us wisdom, we pray that you would give us the ability to address each and every individual need as we see it and the courage to do so. And Lord, even now I pray that you would give us opportunity, I pray that you would give us the ability to meet somebody, whether it's a colleague or a friend or somebody you bump into, whatever it is, Lord, give us a hunger to be able to give the good news no matter what the circumstances are, and an ability to trust you for the results. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.