

Commitment

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[0 : 00] A reading from the book of Matthew.

When Jesus entered Kerbercom, a centurion came to him asking for help. Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.

Jesus said to him, shall I come and heal him? The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go, and he goes, and that one, come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

[1 : 07] But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside in the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then Jesus said to the centurion, go, let it be done just as you believed it would.

And his servant was healed at that moment. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I was on I-20 and I got pulled over by a police officer and I couldn't understand why because I knew I wasn't speeding.

I pull over immediately and he pulls up behind me and then he gets out the car and he motions for me to get out of the car. And he's talking to me and he said, I just wanted to check on you because you were driving under the speed limit.

And I kind of laughed and I said, I was going too slow. And he said, no, no, no, no, it's just that if drivers are really tired or if they're inebriated, they tend to drive slower.

And I said, I just left the base 15 minutes ago and I explained the situation and he said, okay, that's great. And, you know, thank you for your service. And he said, I was just checking on you.

[2 : 09] And as he said that, I just broke down crying and I told him, I said, I was so scared. Have you ever had it happen when you're driving down the road and all of a sudden the lights start flashing?

Especially if you're a woman late at night in the car by yourself or many other kind of situations where you're feeling apprehensive and you're wondering what's going to happen to me.

Police officer gets out of the car. They got that gun. You can always see the gun. Have you ever noticed that? They got the gun and they walk up to your car and you're like, what?

Right? Are we afraid of police officers? Probably in some ways. When I was young, the one who did the enforcing in our house was my father.

And he'd walk in the door and he'd say to my mother, which one needs it? And five of us would scatter like mice, man. Because the hand was coming.

- [3 : 23] Were we afraid of our father? You bet we were. What about your boss? Maybe you've got a good boss. One that is kind and respectful and treats you well.
- But you still know that they have that ability to control and change the course of your life. Right? You ever stand before a judge?
- Really? Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Whatever you say, sir. Whatever you say. Those people can put you in jail. If you're a kid, how about the teacher?
- The teacher can do all kinds of things. They kind of control the classroom. I've got to tell you, even as an adult, when I used to go back for my daughter for a parent conference, you know, things, they had me sit in that little desk.
- Yes, ma'am, whatever you say. Right? You go back to elementary school. We've got a lot of things we struggle with. A lot of things that we find ourselves afraid of.
- [4 : 27] Heck, we're even afraid of a virus right now, aren't we? Little tiny germ. I understand it. I'm not so concerned about the coronavirus. I'm concerned about the flu, which is actually killing thousands of people.
- So everybody kind of being good about your hygiene and all, that's good stuff right now. It's okay to go or give the bump. You're not being rude.
- Put hand sanitizer out. We still have some. Right? Would we be afraid of a king? You know, most of us don't even know what a king is, really.
- We hear about him. We see him on TV from England or something like that. But, you know, the Bible says that we need to understand that we're citizens of the kingdom of God. And I don't think we understand a king.
- Tell you the truth. If King Andy was in town or King Donald was in town, I don't think I'd be afraid. Would you? Not really.
- [5 : 28] They're not kings. I'm just joking. Right? But a king has control over everything. And the king we have is a king we call God.
- And this is what it says in the book of Proverbs. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Isn't that an interesting thing? Somewhere along the line, a healthy fear of God is a good thing.
- It's where things begin. Because the difficulty is, is we can be in a broken relationship with God. And if we're not aware of what that could lead to and consequences, we can find ourselves going down the wrong path for a long, long time.
- Jesus met a centurion in Capernaum. And he walks up to Jesus. Now, you don't know what a centurion is.
- [6 : 33] Maybe. Maybe you do. This is a very powerful Roman officer. This is a guy who has command over generally somewhere between 100 and about 500 soldiers.
- And another several hundred people that work for them. He probably is carrying a sword. An obvious one. Right on the side where everybody can see it.
- He's bigger than a house. I remember in one movie, John Duke Wayne was playing him, right? You picture Arnold Schwarzenegger. Whoever you think is a big guy, right?
- He comes up to Jesus. That's kind of an intimidating thing. He's a man of authority. And people know that.
- And they respect that. Proverbs says, We respect people who have power over us, don't we?
- [7 : 39] Do we think of God that way? A centurion says to Jesus in verse 8, Lord, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.

Just say the word. Wow, do we really believe God can do that by just saying the word?

The kingdom of God is a kingdom. And there's a parable about a wedding banquet. And it says that there was a great king who was throwing a wedding banquet for his son.

And he invited all the guests. And they made all the preparations. And it was time for the day of the feast. And he went to the banquet. And nobody was there. So he sent his servants to remind them, Hey, you know, maybe you didn't know that the clock's changed.

And, you know, it's time for the banquet. But they weren't very kind to the servants. How would you feel?

[8 : 53] Anybody here ever throw a wedding banquet? I'm going to tell you something about wedding banquets. I've done one for my daughter. For most families, it's the biggest party they ever throw in their lives.

You go out and find money wherever you can. And for you guys, don't think that in the last week you will have any control over your checkbook. Because by that point in time, the women have started to run things.

That's how it works. It is a huge banquet. People go into debt for these things. We had to have two. One for our close family and relatives.

And one here for everybody. Because I could not invite the church. So we had a big banquet here. And then we had a big banquet somewhere else. And I noticed who wasn't at the second one.

The first one was open. So he couldn't really tell exactly. And it was pretty big. But the second one, I knew every seat and everybody that was supposed to be in it. And that one was empty. And I knew it.

[10 : 01] Because the host knows who's not going to show up. How would you feel if somebody didn't show up? Maybe you could do this.

The whole thing is just kind of silly. It was a couple weeks ago Jessica Baker was getting ready to go to a wedding with her husband when she got a call from her mom. She had called at the last minute.

She had something come up and said, I can't make it. Her mom was supposed to watch their kids. And since the invitation said no children, that meant no wedding. But then yesterday, the mail came.

You got to be kidding me. Inside, a bill for the dinner they were supposed to have enjoyed. It listed that we would have had two herb-crusted walleye. And then there was also a service and tax charge.

For a total of \$75.90. I guess I don't know what the right answer would have been. What the right thing to do would have been. Jessica didn't attend, but certainly won't forget.

[11 : 00] I don't think I'll be missing another wedding again. That's what I would do, right? When I've kind of not done what I'm supposed to do, I put it on Facebook so everybody can see it.

That was sarcasm for those of you who didn't understand. Don't put it on Facebook, okay? I'm sure that made things better between her and her cousin, right? You see, when you don't show up for the most important banquet of somebody's life and you said you're coming.

Well, let me tell you the rest of the parable because this is a parable we don't talk about very much. The king sent his servants to remind the guests that were invited.

And they basically told him, get lost. Some of them, they mistreated. Do you know what he sent the next time? It says in the Bible, he sent his army and killed them all.

Wow. That's what happens when you go to God's banquet. He sends his army and he kills them all. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[12 : 11] You know, in Matthew, it talks about the fear of the Lord and it says, Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body but can't kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

You know, I'm not too much on fire and brimstone. I tend to like to preach about loving the heaven into people. But once in a while, you've got to talk about scaring the hell out of them. And this is one of them.

Are we living in such a way that we treat God with the same kind of respect as we treat the police officer that comes up to our car window?

Especially if we know we've done something wrong. We live in a transactional society. A consumer culture. Where we tend to think life is about us.

It all revolves around making us happy. The centurion wanted something from Jesus. So do we, right? The centurion's a man of authority.

[13 : 17] He approaches Jesus. Now, he's got the power that he probably could have gone up to him and said, Dude, you're coming to my house and you're going to heal my servant.

Right? He's a powerful man. But he also knows he's a man approaching a person of authority. He knows that Jesus has the power to heal.

And so he approaches him with respect. Just because life is transactional doesn't mean it has to be disrespectful.

And, you know, I understand the idea of being casual. I don't like to, you know, when I was a kid, my grandfather used to come over for dinner dressed like this. I understand sometimes we want to be a little more relaxed and life is a little more casual.

And I'm Pastor Tom and I'm not Reverend Kraft. I get that stuff. I'm okay with it. But sometimes I wonder if we've gone to the point where we're so casual that we've lost the whole sense of respect.

[14 : 20] I was watching a news announcer on ABC and they had a doctor on there talking about the coronavirus. And when she got done with her report, he said, Thanks, Jen.

I thought, Jen? Jen? You call the doctor Jen? I mean, I'm like, Jen? Now, I'm going to tell you, my first thought was, if that was a man, it would have been Dr. Smith.

Don't you think? I really do. But where did we get to the idea that we go into the doctor's office and call her Jen? I never did that.

I still don't do that. Even if they're close friends of mine, when I'm in their office, they're a doctor. I think there's a place where we need to remember that respect matters.

Who we are and how we present ourselves makes a difference. I was having a conversation with a young person the other day about the clothes we wear. Do they make any difference?

[15 : 27] I'll guarantee you, if I walk into a hospital dressed like this, I will get more attention than if I walk in in jeans and a t-shirt. You might say that's not right, but I know it's true. In this parable, it has a really funny little weird ending.

It says that they're having the banquet and they're having a big party and the host is there and he sees a guy there who doesn't have the right clothes on. You know what he did? He's talking about the relationship with God.

Have you made a decision to have God in your life? But clothes can make a huge difference. Years ago, my wife was going to school at the University of Buffalo.

And this was when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State. Anybody remember old Henry? Yeah. And Henry was coming to Buffalo to make a presentation. And my wife was in a political science class or something like that.

And so they decided to go down and protest Henry. A lot of people protested Henry, you know, and I understand that. So she went along with a lot of them, but my wife, when we got married, and, you know, this is kind of the stuff newlyweds do.

[16 : 43] It's kind of goofy, but we went out and bought her a full-length fur coat. You know, it was rabid. It wasn't real expensive. You can get on me about the PETA thing, but I'm just saying, right, she was dressed nice.

She got out of the car in the back of the hotel and was going around front where the other students were and somebody said, oh, no, no, we're over here, we're over here. She said she went with this group of people, passed one security point, passed another security check.

She could see Henry as far away as the back of the sanctuary, and there was a table there, and they said, okay, man, that's \$3,000. Ooh! Ooh! Just because she was dressed nice, they put her in the wrong place.

Because the clothes do make a difference. Do you know why a king wears a crown? A king wears a crown, and the king wears a robe, so people will know who they are. Because it's important to know who's the king, right?

I mean, if you don't know who the king is, you could get yourself in a lot of trouble. I don't think that centurion showed up to see Jesus in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, do you? Now, I'm not criticizing a pair of jeans and t-shirts.

[17 : 59] You know, I wore jeans and sneakers to church last Saturday because I'm having problems with my legs, and people are like, you own sneakers and jeans? Yes, I do. And I wear them. But there's a time when what you wear makes a difference.

And the king wears the crown so people will know who he is and respect what he's doing. The centurion goes up to Jesus, and I'm sure he's dressed in his uniform.

He's got his sword on. He is a man of power. Because they didn't guess he was a centurion. They knew it the minute he walked in the room. And he went up to Jesus, and in verse 8, he called him Lord.

He called him Lord. This is a man of power and authority, but he approaches a man of power and authority, and instead of ordering him, he asks him.

And Jesus could have told him, who the heck are you? You're not Jewish. You don't belong to my crowd. Hit the bricks, pal.

[19 : 14] Instead he said, okay, I'll go with you. Respect begets respect. The kingdom of God is a great banquet.

What do you think a wedding banquet is for? Who do you think it's to honor? The bridegroom, right? And the bride.

Now in the Bible, the bridegroom is Jesus, and the bride, guess who the bride is? It's us, the church, okay? And the host is God. Yes.

And God invites us to a great and wonderful banquet. The best party ever. You can eat all you want. There's no calories, no cholesterol, no sugar.

And then you can go back to the table and eat again. I love it. I'm looking forward to it. It is a time when there'll be no pain or sorrow or hurting or death.

[20 : 20] And even in this world, he gives us his very presence in our lives. So we don't have to be alone. He gives our lives purpose and meaning. And that's why a lot of people say, God, I want to be a part of that kingdom.

Absolutely. Sign me up. But you see, the problem is, because we're a consumer society, we think it's all about us. Give me the Benny's, Lord.

But don't be expecting anything out of me. Now, I want you to think about this. If you were supposed to go into work for the day, and you said, oh, I don't know, there's a football game, and my family's in town.

Besides, the boss is kind of boring, and I don't like the music they play in the office. Because the coworkers aren't always friendly, and, you know, I might end up getting sick. And I wanted to sleep in.

The chairs are uncomfortable. So I'm not coming. Just send the check to my house, right? Sometimes I think that's where we treat God, don't we?

[21 : 23] God, I want all the benefits you can give to me, but I don't even want to show up at your banquet party for your son.

Here's another one of those verses we rarely preach on. 2 Thessalonians. It says, For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule.

The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat. That kind of hits, doesn't it? Especially since I'm thinking of retiring.

What does that mean, man? I don't get to eat anymore. Do you know what Lord means? The original meaning of the word Lord. The keeper of the bread. The one who had control over the food.

Now, I got to say, if you get really down in life to the bottom of what really matters, that's probably about the most important thing there is. You got to have food.

[22 : 27] God is our Lord. He provides us with the very sustenance of life. He has the power to change anything. Did you notice in verse 13, Jesus says, Go, let it be done, just as you believed it.

And his servant was healed at that moment. Wow. Have we ever wanted that from Jesus? God, if you just do this right now.

You know, he has the power. Do we have the respect for Jesus that the centurion did? Two leaders.

Mutual respect. Is the wedding banquet for the couple? Or is the wedding banquet for the guests?

Or is the wedding banquet for the host? Which do you think? All of the above.

[23 : 38] Yes. All of the above. That's what mutual respect is about, right? All of the above. Respecting one another.

Give us this day our daily bread. Your kingdom come. On earth as it is in heaven. God gives us what we need.

And we give him what he wants. We're a transactional culture. I understand that.

Even they were. We tend to look at life as to, what can you give to me, and I'll give something to you. And if you send me a Christmas card for three years in a row, I might send you one, maybe.

Right? Right? But if you don't send one, off the list you go. Contraversal that way. I understand that. But, when we get all the focus on us, and everything's about us, not only does it break us here, it breaks us for eternity.

[24 : 51] I love this one image that I was given of glory. Now, I don't know if this is true. I doubt it. But just picture it, if you will. People have got long forks attached to their hands.

Ever hear this one? And there's like all the food you could ever imagine in front of them. But you can't get the food to your mouth because you can't, you know?

You can't get that fork in your mouth. And there's a lot of people up there that are frustrated for all eternity trying to get that food in their mouth.

But at the other part of the banquet table, there's a whole lot of people that are happy. You know why? They're feeding each other. Right?

Transactional's not bad in and of itself so long as we understand that we're respecting and loving each other respecting and loving God. Do we really even appreciate who God is?

[25 : 53] Not what God will do for us. Not what God is capable of. But who God is. Knowing God is more than just knowing He's out there or knowing about Him.

It's actually knowing God. Who God is is a king. which means that God not only has to deal with our wants and our desires, He's got to take care of the whole world.

Harry decided he didn't want to be royalty. Did you notice that? Prince Harry don't want to be a prince anymore. Too much responsibility, he said.

It interferes with what I want to do with me and mine. So he gave the crown away, didn't he? I don't know Harry, so you know, don't get all over me because I talked about Harry.

I just know what they said about Harry and what he said. See, he didn't want the crown because it's too much responsibility. I wouldn't want to be king.

[26 : 58] I wouldn't even want to be governor. Good Lord, I wouldn't want to be president. What an awful job. Can you imagine carrying the responsibility for all the people of the kingdom making sure they're fed, they're safe, they're taken care of, they're nurtured, they're happy.

That's who God is. God is caring for all of us like a loving daddy. He even cares like this centurion about a suffering servant.

You would have thought he would have tossed the servant aside. He's got a lot of them. But the centurion cares about every one of them. So who are we in this story?

You know, when you listen to a story, don't you always put yourself in the story and you think of yourself as somebody? Are you the centurion? Are you the servant? Are you Jesus? Are you the people in the crowd around him?

Are you the people that got invited to the banquet and didn't come? Are you the people that were out on the street that after the people said they wouldn't come, the king invited everybody else in?

[28 : 10] It says that they came from the north and the south and the east and the west. People that weren't supposed to be at the banquet and God invited them in. Which ones are we?

And how do we see our God? I guess it changes sometimes, doesn't it? When I was young, we almost never went to a banquet.

I mean, we just never got invited. You know what I mean? And if we did get invited, well, we couldn't afford it.

I mean, you're supposed to bring a gift. The gift that you would take to a wedding banquet would have been half of my income. That would have been no food that week.

We didn't go to very many banquets. Once in a while, we went. We did the dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee dee. Anybody remember the old bird song?

[29 : 10] Yeah. Chicken song or whatever it was called, right? Now, I got to tell you, I get invited to banquets all the time. I mean, to the point that I know exactly how they're going to go.

I'm invited to literally so many of them that you know I've told people my job is to be a party animal I go to parties all the time and some people say isn't that a bit much why don't you just say no because I've been the host I've been the host to the party that somebody didn't show up at in fact I've been the host to the party where almost nobody showed up I don't go for the food I don't care for the go for the entertainment I don't go to party I go for the host because they cared enough to include me the least I could do is care enough to be there for them God is the host he's invited everybody in and I am so grateful to God for giving me the opportunity to come to his banquet that I want to do whatever it takes because I don't see God as scary

I see God as loving see the rest of this video but the positive spin is that he really was just a nice officer checking to see if I was okay but the sad piece is that I shouldn't have had to feel this scared shouldn't have to feel this scared he was just checking on me because he was concerned that's how God is he's concerned about us he loves us the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but it's not the end of it when I was a little child my daddy frightened me because he was like 300 feet tall and huge you know what I'm talking about he had the power to do whatever it take my life away but when I got older

I didn't fear God my father my father was my friend we'd sit and chat for hours the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God but that's not what God wants it to be my father and I we had a wonderful relationship now could he still punish me I suppose he could if I never really thought about it anymore because that fear wasn't a part of my life God doesn't want you to be afraid he wants you to feel his love in 1 John chapter 4 it says to us there's no fear in love because perfect love drives out fear fear has to do with punishment the one who fears hasn't been made perfect in love God is calling us to become perfect in him so that we don't fear God because he gives to us and we give to him and as we do so we become perfect in God's love

God is calling you to the banquet table are you willing to come and give your life because he's given his life for you I had a cough it seems to be gone but my voice is too okay on the way out I'd love to greet you but I'm probably not going to shake your hands not just because I don't know what I have but I don't know what you have and I don't want to spread it to the whole church we have with us the Reverend Nicole Henderson from the Ohio Conference to share our benediction this morning now as Pastor Tom said sometimes we don't recognize people unless they have their stuff on so I had to put my stuff on I see you good good I also I can't I'm on vacation but I can't fully be on vacation so I got to put the stole on to feel like I'm doing something so this morning I send you with greetings from Summerside and Batavia Faith United Methodist Churches and also from the West Ohio Conference and I send you with the reminder that you belong you belong to God you belong to the one who has created all things who has created each and every one of you for a purpose for a reason and for the power of the Holy Spirit to work through you each and every day so go today in peace love, hope, and joy remembering that you are called remembering that you belong remembering you are chosen and remembering you are part of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven these things we pray in God's holy name

[34 : 24] Amen