

“The Search for Substance”

Who Needs the Past?, Pt. 2

We’re looking at a number of the Psalms this summer. All during the pandemic, we have been having a Wednesday morning prayer meeting on Zoom in which we read a different Psalm and then take prayer requests – it’s at 8am and I’d love to have you join us. But I’ve been struck by how grounded the Psalms are for the human condition in any age. They really are ancient solutions to modern problems.

Here’s how one of my favorite theologians described them, “The book of Psalms provides the most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resources given us in the biblical tradition. In season and out of season, generation after generation, faithful women and men turned to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about things that matter most.” (Breuggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 15)

Now, the problem many people in our society have with that statement in this particular moment is the word “tradition”. We said last week, that we are living in an age in which the past in general is not being considered with much wisdom. Some people are defending *everything* that took place in the past merely because that’s how it’s always been – “if it was good enough for my grandpappy...” – but that’s

clearly foolishness. There are all kinds of evils from the past that need to be excoriated.

But then in reaction – and this is Martin Luther’s description of human history as watching a drunk man try to get on a horse; he falls off on one side and then gets up and falls off on the *other* side – so you have a movement to throw out *anything* that took place in the past. Because everybody was wrong about something by today’s standards. But what we forget is that we will be judged by that same standard by our descendants – and I don’t doubt, there’s not any of us that will get to have a statue either – because clearly we are blind to our own failures and limitations.

This is a big part of what drove me to study historical theology, because it allows us to understand how – in spite of all our flaws and mistakes – ideas develop over time, many of them very beneficial for human progress and flourishing. My favorite historical theologian, the late Jaroslav Pelikan has a great quote about this responsible use of the past. He says, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.”

Indeed. So instead of just throwing the past out completely – or embracing it entirely – what is required is wisdom. And I would argue that there is no better place in human literature to discover wisdom than in the book of Psalms. So we started our quest for wisdom last week with the opening Psalm and the pursuit of happiness. We're going back to that same well this morning, but to focus on a little different agenda. So let me start by reading you these brief verses.

Psalm 1

*1Blessed is the one
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
2Their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
3That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever they do prospers.
4Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
5Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
6For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

The front page of Friday's *New York Times* announced that in the second quarter of this year, the US gross domestic product endured the largest single quarter drop in history, wiping out five years of economic growth. Now, before you jump out a window – which thankfully we're on the ground floor – just remember that the economy is cyclical – it goes up and down and will go up again. But be careful about using those cycles as a standard of human flourishing.

From 1955 to 1975 we passed through, in this country, one of the eras in which there was the most economic growth. There was a fast rise in lifestyle and in the standard of living, and there was an enormous optimism at the time of those things we will probably never see again. This is the "Make America Great Again" era that a lot of people are looking for. And yet, during those 20 years, the teenage suicide rate in this country went up 300 percent. And all of the social commentators agreed that was very significant, and none of them could agree on what it was significant of.

But I think probably the best answer of all came out of the mouth of one of the kids himself. There was a young teenage boy in the mid-80s in Houston who hanged himself on a tree and left a note on the tree, that said, "This is the only thing around here that has any roots." I want to talk this morning about having roots.

Now, there are two sides to having roots. On the one hand, roots is a very positive sounding concept. To have roots means you are substantial. It means you're rooted in. It means you endure. It means you last. Roots enable you to be able to handle storms, to help you stand your ground, and so in all those ways roots give you stability and certainty. They build mass. They protect. That's what roots are there to do.

But on the other hand, roots limit your freedom. Roots confine *even as*, and actually *because*, they protect, nurture, nourish, and stabilize you. "Putting down roots" is the exact opposite of being a "jet setter". Do you see the two sides?

In the mid-80s, Tom Wolfe, the late celebrated novelist, spoke at Harvard Class Day. Now, Wolfe grew up Presbyterian in middle America, but wandered from his faith, never the less he was a defender of religion as a source of societal good. He said, "Throughout history, through all ages, all human beings have always sought two kinds of freedom, but today we're after a third kind as well. The two kinds of freedom we've always searched after are freedom from tyranny and freedom from want. Under freedom from tyranny are included things like freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and freedom of political determination. Under freedom from want are included things like freedom of economic opportunity and so on."

But Tom Wolfe went on and said, "Today we are seeking, and even expecting, a third kind of freedom that is unprecedented." He said this is freedom *from* religion. Not freedom *of* religion; we've always wanted that. He said, "Today we expect freedom from religion," and he defined it this way: freedom from the internal guidelines your parents stick in there and the clergy stick in there; freedom to write your *own* morality, freedom to determine your own destiny, and freedom to decide the nature of spiritual reality for yourself. He said, "That has never, ever been sought before. It's the *final* freedom, the last restriction."

Now what are the results of the final freedom? The result of the final freedom is rootlessness. When our ancestors said, "I have roots," here's what they meant. "This is my country. This is my family. This is my faith, and so many of the things I do I do because I have obligations, because I have commitments. I may not *want* to do them. My feelings go this way and my impulses this way. Sometimes it doesn't look like it's in my best interest...but I have roots! I have some duties here, some commitments."

We have cut all of those elements. We have cut all of those things. We have said, "Now we're free," but our ancestors had both less freedom and less despair than we do. Because you see, a plant without roots is at best a tumbleweed. Is a tumbleweed freer than an oak tree? Yeah, it's free to be blown about forever. This is the metaphor of this psalm, the tree vs. the chaff.

And there is what the Bible calls a rootlessness and a weightlessness about our society right now, a superficiality. And everybody in this room to one degree or another is affected by it, and we have to fight against it. So what I'd like to do this morning is to talk about what the Bible says regarding this condition. We'll call it the Search for Substance.

And it's not the kind of thing many of you walk in here thinking you need to know about. I mean, there are immediate problems going on. But this pandemic will pass, the economic situation will turnaround, the political direction will change. But after all of that, this issue of substance remains. And I'm hoping, as we actually do the biblical analysis, you'll begin to see that some of your problems today - *many* of your problems today - maybe the *main* problem you face today, is you've been taken over or affected deeply by this weightlessness and rootlessness we experience in our culture and society.

Even though it's a *modern* condition, even though it's running rampant today, even though Tom Wolfe said, in a sense, it's unprecedented, the fact is the roots of the rootlessness, this condition, were diagnosed long ago in this psalm, and the prescription is laid out here. Let's take a look.

First of all it offers **The diagnosis of rootlessness**. The Bible talks about chaff and says there is a life on the surface, a life of superficiality and rootlessness, which can affect people. It says, (v.4) "*The wicked...are like chaff that the wind drives away.*" Now let me talk to you about what that means. What is a life of chaff? Chaff is referring to an agricultural process. When you would harvest back in those days, you would toss up into the wind the grain you had gathered – it's called winnowing.

Now the grain consisted of two parts. On the one hand you had the internal kernel. You had the life itself, the organic part of the grain, and it had more substance to it. And therefore, because it was heavier, it would fall down. The chaff was the husk around the kernel. It was the sleeve – you've had corn on the cob. The husk is lighter. It's useless, and the wind would blow it away.

When the Bible talks about a life of chaff, what is it talking about? Chaff represents a life which is totally consisting in externals, a life without any enduring, internal reality behind the façade. A life of chaff means to be constantly blown about by the winds of public opinion and trends, by the winds of your own impulses and feelings of the moment, blown about by the winds of suffering and trial because you have no roots. You have nothing to keep yourself from being *continually* blown about. Now I know I'm talking metaphorically, but this is absolutely practical.

When the Bible talks about this, what is it describing? When I was in college, a movie came out called *Indecent Proposal*. Robert Redford offers happily married Woody Harrelson a million dollars to sleep his wife, the lovely Demi Moore. This was back when a 57 year old man could creep on a 31 year old woman without getting Me Too'd. And it was enormously popular. Sixth highest grossing movie of 1993.

People came out, not just because it was a sexy movie – *The Body Guard* was sexy and it was 38th. I believe people came out because they were wrestling themselves with the central, crucial question of the age. “Is there *anything* that under *any* circumstance is *always* wrong? A million dollars! Hey, think of what we could do with that, Honey! Just imagine.” Is there anything that’s *always* wrong?

Make it personal. Are there any rooted convictions in *you*, that regardless of the wind blowing, regardless of the advantages or the disadvantages, regardless of the feelings, regardless of the conditions...that will *never* change? Let me put it another way. Is there anything in you that’s *always* there? It’s just always there. Is there anything about you that’s *nonnegotiable*...no matter what people threaten you with, no matter what people entice you with, and no matter how your feelings are? That’s a given. That’s a commitment. That’s a root.

In other words, is there anything behind your image? Is there substance behind the façade? Is there anything deep inside you that’s always there? That’s the question. The Bible says if there are no nonnegotiables in your life, if there are no commitments - things you’re always true to, you always believe, you always hold onto, you always do regardless of either the enticements on the one hand or the threats on the other hand, from the outside or even from the inside - if there’s nothing in the center, then you’re chaff.

That’s what the chaff is. It’s centerless. The kernel is gone. It’s a husk. It’s a shell. You’re a form without power. That’s the life of chaff. And it’s not just found on the Jersey Shore, there’s plenty on display right here in Austin. Now, what causes a life of chaff? And the Bible says the answer is ungodliness. The word “ungodliness” unfortunately does not appear in the translation we used. In the very beginning it says, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked...” I think that’s a poor translation. Look at the old King James Version, (v.1 KJV) “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the **ungodly**...*”

The word “wicked” is tricky. Of course wicked people are always ungodly, but ungodly people aren’t always wicked. Wicked means violent, vile. To be ungodly, though, means the roots of your soul are not in God. That’s all. Now of course, an ungodly person might be somebody who doesn’t believe in God or doesn’t know if there is a God, or is just indifferent to God. But an ungodly person could also be someone who believes in God but the roots of your soul do not actually go into God and make Him your life source. Roots in a tree, roots of a plant, go down into the water, go down into the life source.

You can believe in God in general, but if God is not your life source, if He’s not the way in which you decide things, if He’s not your standard of measurement, that’s a life without God, and that’s what the ungodly life is. And the Bible says ungodliness creates a life of chaff, not just whether you believe in God or don’t believe in God, but whether your *roots* are in God. Well, how does ungodliness create a life of chaff? Let’s take a look at it.

When you dismiss God, first of all, it creates this life of chaff because it creates **intellectual instability**. “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly...” “Stay away,” says the psalmist, “from the counsel of the ungodly.” We said last week that this is talking about your mind, your thoughts, your intellect. There’s an intellectual instability when you leave God out.

This is one of the benefits that a Christian has when she looks to the past. Those of you who today are Christians, isn’t it great to know that for the last 3,000 years people have taken the Bible and based their lives on it and its truth? A thousand years from now, if the world is still here, there’ll be people doing the same thing, lots and lots of them. If they can read your diaries, your quiet time notebooks, they would understand them, just like we can read the great journals and the prayers of the men and women of God of 1,000 or 2,000 years ago and say, “This is my brother. This is my sister.” There’s a stability there intellectually.

Not to say it’s completely static, of course. New ages, new cultures, new regions and places require adaptation. We ask the Bible new questions. We see new things in it, but there’s a stability there. The church for two thousand years had debated scripture, but never just tossed it out and started over. Those are the deep roots of “the law of the Lord.” However, “Don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly.” It’s *totally* different with secular knowledge. Any intellectual system that leaves God out is a revolving door. Just study today’s academic attacks on Enlightenment era thinking— that’s what post-modernism is all about.

But you don't have to go back centuries. I heard a piece on NPR this Wednesday morning about a Boston cab driver who was murdered in 1979. A witness said he saw three men get in the cab that night but it was blurry. So the police put him under hypnosis and he later used the image that emerged to identify a 16-year-old kid who had been asleep in a foster home under lock and key all night. But they arrested him anyway and based on the results of Rorschach test - where you describe what you see in the inkblots - the judge decided his mind was twisted and dangerous and he didn't show enough remorse for the crime...the crime that he insisted he didn't commit.

So they tried this kid as an adult and sentenced him to life in prison. He served 38 *years* before his sentence was tossed out because...hypnosis and Rorschach tests are garbage science! We can't believe this nonsense today. But that was accepted psychology in the 1970's. There have been at least 10 established cases of wrongful conviction based on "forensic hypnosis."

Or the "science of race", oh my word, this is so much of our problem today. The same enlightenment scientists that were categorizing all the plants and animals in the 18th century, invented new categories for human beings like Caucasian and Negroid and Asian. I'll let you guess which one the all-white scientists put at the top! And much of that was motivated by the economic benefits of African slavery.

But that was the accepted science for centuries. Some of you still think there are significant biological differences between black people and white people because that's what you were taught. But then we discovered the human genome. Modern DNA science shows that "race" is a biological non-reality. Don't get me wrong, it's a political and social reality, but it's bad science.

What's the point? Friends, what right now is put to you in the journals, in the newspapers, and in the media as being the assured result of reflection and research, the wave of the future, 50 years from now a large part of it will be in the dustbin. It'll be on the scrap heap. Why? The counsel of the ungodly is rootless. It constantly changes, and if you believe it, it will turn you into chaff. That's what it's saying here. "Blessed is the man that walketh *not* in the counsel of the ungodly..."

Now, there's another sermon we need to do here about not falling for conspiracy theories *either*. See, the overreaction to critical thinking about experts, is to toss out experts all together. There's no wisdom in ignoring sound medical opinion - even though we do recognize it is *opinion* - in favor of whatever the latest quack on YouTube tells you. The answer to the "counsel of the ungodly" is not chaos, it's wisdom.

Ok, so there's intellectual instability. Let me go a little further. Secondly, ungodliness creates social and personal instability. Friedrich Nietzsche would have been an ally of Tom Wolfe. He too was writing his best stuff in the 80's – just the 1880s. But over 100 years ago Nietzsche realized the belief in God was losing its compelling power in Western society, and it bothered him. Like Wolfe he wasn't a Christian, but still he wasn't happy about it.

Nietzsche is famous for the statement that “God is dead”, but that's not a good thing. Because he understood that what remained after the funeral would seem weightless and hollow. Here are his words, “When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet...By breaking one main concept out of Christianity, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands.” (*Twilight of the Idols*)

Now, if Nietzsche is a little too heady for you, let me give you the words of a more modern prophet -or I should prophesess – Princess Elsa from *Frozen*...

*It's time to see what I can do
To test the limits and break through
No right, no wrong, no rules for me
I'm free*

That's the freedom Tom Wolfe was talking about. No limits, no rules, no roots. Just let it go. But Nietzsche was right about what happens when you let it go. And I think the Disney movie was too, I mean she did freeze out the whole kingdom after all. But the “new freedom” leads to a hollowness both sociologically and psychologically. Do I need to give examples...or are you already on social media?

All the research shows that Americans more and more perceive that we can't trust anybody. Everybody is motivated by self-interest, and no matter what they say on the outside, there is not a reality behind it. Americans are unbelievably cynical over what they were 20 years ago about what the politicians tell them, about what the clergy tell them – believe me! - and about what the doctors tell them. Doctors, we don't trust you. We trust *our* doctor, just not *the* doctors. The polls all say so. We don't trust big business, we don't trust advertisers, we don't trust the media...who can you trust? Walter Cronkite is dead.

We think they're all out for themselves. We don't think anyone has the national good in mind, but only their own self-interest. Why do we think this? Because everyone is singing, “No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free.” And therefore there's a *hollowness* in our culture that's growing and growing, and we're all part of it. And we start to say, “Well, I'm being ripped off. I better start ripping off”.

This is what the tax form *says* you made this year, but behind it there's no reality to that. This is what the advertiser *says*... Nietzsche said, "If God is dead, everything is weightless, morality is pulled out from under your feet." Do you see the damage that is bound to cause not just sociologically and culturally, but psychologically? What happens to us when everything is negotiable?

"Well, I don't believe in committing adultery, but a million dollars? Think of what that would do for my kids." I said, I didn't like the NIV translation, but then again, it's not that big of a leap from ungodly to wicked. I mean, good grief, even Katy Perry knew that if you stood for nothing, you'd fall for everything! If there's nothing inside you that is always, always right and always, always wrong, if there's not something inside you that you're always committed to, if there's no *you* in there, you're just a series of faces. You're no more stable than the outfits that you change from day to day – today's fashion, tomorrow's GoodWill.

We have more consumer stuff than any society that has ever existed on this planet. And we may be the most depressed society in history. Everything is hollow; everything is weightless. Why? Because ungodliness leads to it. "*The ungodly...are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*" Now that's the problem, so what's the solution?

First the diagnosis, **second, The prescription for rootlessness.** How do we get a life of substance? Everybody in this room to some degree or another is hurting because of this tremendous modern pressure to be hollow and weightless. Those of us who are Christians are no exception. We try very hard, and yet we're so concerned about show. This rampant consumerism is eating the church alive. If you, coming to this church, you come on in, and unless the music is great, unless you really get a high, you're not coming back. You just move all around from church to church. It all depends on what meets your needs today.

The idea of being committed to something and sticking with it through hell or high water...how old fashioned. And this pandemic is really exposing it. If being part of the body of Christ is about a rock and roll light show and a big auditorium and a kids' ministry that looks like a carnival, that's all gone when the church service is closed down. I know of three pastors who have committed suicide in the last year. The church in America is being weighed. Will we have substance?

Don't you see what's going on? There's a *hollowness* about us. It's creeping in on us. It's pushing in on us. We want to have our needs met. We want to go with the flow, but we're actually being blown about from church to church, from morality to morality, from marriage to marriage, and from gender to gender. Everything changes, because there's no reality behind the façade.

Now how do we get that life of substance? It's fairly simple. What's the difference between a tree and chaff? The chaff is connected to nothing. The tree is connected to something beside itself. Do you hear that? It has roots that go out beyond itself. That's the reason why the chaff is representative of a life in which the only thing that guides you is what's inside you; your impulses, your feelings. And therefore, there's no you, nothing in there but your "freedom", nothing outside of you that can discipline you because you let it go.

But the tree goes outside of itself. What does it go to? The first thing we see from this metaphor is the tree goes into the law of the Lord. If you look, it's not that hard to see. In **verse 2**, it says, "*But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*" In **verse 3**, it says, "*He is like a tree planted by streams of water ...*" It's very, very clear. The parallelism is the tree putting its roots down into water parallels the person delighting in the law of the Lord.

And so the very, very first and most important thing to understand is, for you to get a life of substance, for you to avoid the hollowing out, the "chaffiness" of modern life, you have to get yourself connected and committed to God's truth...not just any truth. You know Hitler was a man of principle. It was the *wrong* principle, and so he destroyed himself. He destroyed the world, and he destroyed all kinds of people because he chose a principle that wasn't in accord with God's reality and God's truth.

The way in which you can have a life of substance is you have to connect with God's truth, and here's why. Let me show you this. The Bible says God alone has glory. The Hebrew word for glory – *kavod* - means "weight" or "heaviness". Just the opposite of chaff. And the Bible says because God has no beginning and no ending, God alone lasts. God alone has substance. God alone matters. He *is* matter. And everything else is ephemeral. Everything else is fleeting. Everything else is fading. Everything else is transitory except to the degree it is connected to God.

When you give God glory, and only to the degree you give God glory, do you get any of that weight, that matter, that reality, or that substance yourself. Let me be very practical about this. When the law of God is revealed to us in the Bible, this is not busy work. The law of God is actually revealing the very fabric of God's heart and the fabric of the reality that God has made in His own image. It reveals the glory of God.

So to the degree you are obeying the law of God, to that degree you're *real*. You've woven yourself into the fabric of things. But to the degree that you disobey God, the more you disobey the law of God, the more unreal you become. The more ephemeral, fleeting, and ghostlike you get. Let me just show you. Let me be extremely practical.

Every time, you break one of the Ten Commandments...let's stay with sex. Every time you have sex with somebody you're not married to, every time you have sex because it feels good, because you're following those feelings, following that desire for satisfaction, instead of making sex what God says it should be, which is an expression of *permanent* marital commitment, you're hollowing out.

People say, "Well, I want to live with him. I want to live with her, but I don't want to be married." Do you know what that means? "I don't want to be vulnerable – to open myself to risk. I am committed to nothing except my right to be happy without commitment. I am committed to nothing except I should have the right to do what makes me happy without having to honor commitments." There's nothing there! In other words, "I'm committed to nothing but the fact that I shouldn't have to commit myself." You're hollowing out.

Or how about "thou shall not lie"? One of the books I read while we were away on vacation this month was Howard Thurman's, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (55) A classic work of theology during the civil rights movement. Thurman went to seminary with Martin Luther King's *dad*. In fact, the book is based on a series of lectures he gave in 1948 at the historically black Houston-Tillotson College, right here in Austin!

He's talking about the options that people without power have in the face of oppression. And in one chapter on deception, he's talking about the avenues that the weak have available to them in order to merely survive in the onslaught of the strong. And one of those is to say, "Well, the system is rigged against us, so there is no need to play by the rules. So for example, if the white man won't listen to your truth anyway, we might as well lie."

But Thurman is a Christian and he warns that the one who actually gets hurt by a life of deception is actually the oppressed person themselves. Listen to his quote, "The penalty of deception is to become a deception, with all sense of moral discrimination vitiated. A man who lies habitually becomes a lie, and it is increasingly impossible for him to know when he is lying and when he is not. In other words, the moral mercury of life is reduced to zero." He's talking about weightlessness.

You can't decide to do an end run around one of the commandments of God, around the law of the Lord. You can't do that. When you break the commandments of God, the commandments of God break you, not because they're mean or cranky, but because they are reality. The law of gravity doesn't care if you believe in it or not, you're still going to fall.

And we still are weightless, and we still are rootless today if the only way we make up our minds about what is right and wrong is about how it feels right now or what the latest public opinion is. Don't you see? God alone is real. To the degree you obey God you become real. To the degree you disobey God you become chaff. You become unreal. You're hollowing out.

Now finally, it's not enough to simply say, "Okay, the Bible is a rule book. I'm going to take it out, and I'm going to start living according to the Ten Commandments. I'm going to start living according to the Sermon on the Mount, and then I will start to become more substantial. I'll start to become a person of principle. I'll start to become a person of conviction. I'll start to know who I am. I'll start to develop roots."

That's not the whole picture, because the image here is that when the tree puts its roots down into the truth, the truth is actually turning this into a living organism. The picture the Bible is trying to get across to you is an abstract principle won't do. You have to not just obey the Bible. You have to be born again by the Word of God.

1 Peter 1:23 says, "*For you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring **word of God.***" The Word of God, the *truth* of the Word of God, has to not just be taken in in an abstract way, just obeyed in a kind of abstract way, it actually has to be taken in in such a way you're born again through it. That's what it's saying.

The Bible says it's not enough just to say, "Honesty is the best policy." No, you have to take the truth of God in in such a way you become a new person with it. And that's why even the Psalms – in themselves – are not enough. You have to read them through the one to whom they point. It's not what you can do with it – the word of God - it's what *it* can do with *you*. A godly person is like a tree. A tree doesn't plant itself. A tree has to be planted.

You don't make yourself a Christian. You become a Christian when you accept what Jesus has done *for you*. What did he do for you? He left heaven, and he was born as a child. But not just that. He lived a perfect life; a perfect human life of perfect compassion, perfect justice, and perfect obedience. But not just that. He died on that terrible hill to take your punishment.

Why did he do all that? To stand in your place, to live the life you should have lived and to pay the debt you should have paid. And when you realize you will never, ever, ever be right with God simply by, in an abstract way, taking His principles out and trying to cram them in, but when you realize Jesus has done all this for you, and you rest and receive him as your Savior, the truth comes in, and you become a living organism. You get planted.

The psalmist doesn't say, "The godly is like a great oak tree, but the wicked is sort of like a little dogwood tree." It's not what it says. It says one is like a tree, and one is like chaff. The difference between the godly and the ungodly is not that the godly is a nicer person or a better person. It's a difference of *nature*. The godly has been planted. The godly has been given a *new* nature.

Can we be honest? Some of you are desperately trying to cover up how afraid you are that you don't matter, that nobody notices you, that you seem inconsequential. Many of you are so unhappy because you're not romantically involved – your life must not matter if "nobody wants you". Some of you are unhappy because your career is not going in the right direction, and you feel so inconsequential. Nobody notices. It's like you don't matter. You don't want people to realize how upset that makes

you, but I'm telling you, might as well come out of the shadows. Join me in the light of reality. It's not so abnormal.

The Bible says we all hunger for glory. You were built for God's glory. Here's the only way to get it. The paradox of the gospel is when you finally go to God and say, "Lord, your will matters more than my will. Lord, I'm going to live for your glory, not my glory. Lord, you matter more than I matter. Your will and your Word are more important than my feelings and my needs." And the irony is when you say, "You matter more than I do," you begin to matter to the only one who matters. You are loved by the only one whose love is eternal, is solid, and is lasting.

God says to you, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my love for you will never pass away." That's glory! God is saying to you, "The heavens, the earth, the mountains...They're *nothing* compared to you. They're ephemeral. They're fleeting. They're ghosts. They're a mist...compared to my love for you." That's glory, that's real weight. So many of us come to Austin to try to "make it"...at university or in a particular profession. But that's not the glory that will do it. Some of you have come here to find somebody to get married. That's not the glory that will do it.

This and this alone: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my love for you will never pass away.” Do you want a life of chaff? Do you want to be blown about by the winds of chance? Or do you want to be a tree? Christian friends, do you have a reality inside that matches the façade? Are you really what you show other people you are? Are you glorying in God? Are you making Jesus the most important thing in every part of your life? Are you? That’s what it means to glory in God.

The more you glory in God - the more you put Him first in your job, the more you put Him first in your romantic life, the more you put Him first in your sex life, the more you put Him first in your possessions, the more you put Him first in your thought life, in your intellectual life, in your vocational life, the more you make God matter more than anything else - the more you grow yourself in reality and weight. Are you more like a tree? Or more like the chaff?

Let’s pray...