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What Does It Really Mean to Believe in Jesus?

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Series: Sovereign

Romans 10:16-21

BIG IDEA – IS YOUR LIFE MARKED BY OBEDIENCE ROOTED IN FAITH?

Pastor John Piper says the Christian life is a call to risk and that you will either live with risk or waste your life. If you've been around over the last month or so, you've probably been reminded of the fact that here at Two Cities, we value risk and mission and adventure. That's one of the reasons why every summer we have the Acts 1:8 Project for our college students.

Now, every summer, I'll tell you what happens. Our college students go overseas. They finish the project. They come back, and they say something like, "My entire view of the world has changed." They'll say, "Getting out of my comfort zone was one of the best things I've ever done. It was such a meaningful time."

Whenever they say that to me, I always respond the same way. I say, "I'm not surprised at all that you had such a meaningful time, because you were created not just to give your summer to the mission of God; you were created to give your entire life to the mission of God." So, if you're a college student, let me just say, we want to invest in you.

What we understand here is that many college students come to our city to leave it. We understand it. We embrace it, and we want so many things for our college students. If you're a college student, we want you to have more than just a good time in college where you're trying to get a ring before spring, although occasionally, we'll be able to help with the "ring before spring" part. It has been known to happen.

We want so much more for you. We want to invest in you throughout the year, but especially during the Acts 1:8 Project is when we do that. So, here's what our challenge is

to every college student: Would you prayerfully consider giving half of one of your summers to the Acts 1:8 Project? We believe it will be one of the most meaningful, valuable things you do while you're in college.

Speaking of the mission of God, if you've been here for the last month, you've noticed that it is a unique season in the life of our church, as we are planning to plant three different churches in 2027. Let me tell you that it is going to be a bittersweet gospel goodbye for my family and me as we move to Charlotte to plant a new church next year, because I love this place. I love this church. I love this staff.

I'm not going to know what to do with myself when I don't have Pastor Kyle keeping me on my toes week in and week out. I'm not going to know what to do with myself when I'm not scheduled to preach on Labor Day weekend Sunday. You're not going to believe this. I looked it up this past week. I've been scheduled to preach every Labor Day weekend Sunday for seven years. Thank you. Happy to be here. Every Labor Day weekend, I'm laboring. It's funny how that works.

Here's what you need to know about our church plants. Two weeks from today, on Sunday the 20th, shortly after our 11:00 a.m. service, we're going to have interest meetings for all three of our church plants. We're going to have childcare for both. We're going to have food for both.

We call these *interest meetings* for a reason. There's a reason these aren't called "commitment meetings." These are just for anyone who's interested in hearing the vision, the values, the story, and the timeline of these church plants. I really believe many of you will be very encouraged to hear about the stories of what the Lord is doing in each of these different church plants. So, let's take a moment to pray. We have a lot to cover in Romans 10. Let's pray.

Father, you tell us in your Word that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. I just want to thank you for how you have raised up so many workers here in the life of this church over the last 10 years. I pray that you would do so even more in the years to come. Specifically, Father, I want to pray that you would raise up more and more college students who are going to be laborers for you.

Would you use the Acts 1:8 Project to create in many of them a heart for local, national, and global ministry? Lord, I pray that you would help each of us have the courage to take our next steps, regardless of what you're calling us toward, knowing that the gospel goes forward one conversation, one relationship, and one gospel risk at a time. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.

Information and transformation are not the same thing. There is a big gap between knowing what you should do and actually doing it. Think about the world we live in. Humans have never existed at a time where there is more access to immediate information as we do right now, but access to that information doesn't make transformation any easier, does it?

I mean, think about it this way. You can have ChatGPT create for you an incredible diet and workout plan, personalized for you, but it doesn't make working out or going on a run any easier. It doesn't make eating very healthy easier. Because when you go to Chick-fil-A, what are you ordering? You're not ordering the Market Salad; you're ordering the new chicken and waffle sandwich, which has 700 calories. I looked it up. Can you believe it?

Many of you have read the articles and seen the documentaries about the dangers of social media and how addictive it is and how bad it can be for your health, but you're still scrolling, aren't you? You're still watching all of the mom reels on Instagram and all that stuff.

You've seen the charts over the years of how investing in index funds, slowly but surely, from the time you're in your 20s until you're in your 60s, is going to lead to massive wealth, but spending is still a pretty big issue, isn't it? Your Amazon shopping cart is always full. It can be challenging. Here's the point: information and transformation are not the same thing. Knowing something is not the same thing as doing something.

So, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Flip to Romans, chapter 10. Up to this point in chapter 10, Paul has been building his case for how sending leads to preaching, and preaching leads to hearing, which leads to believing, which leads to calling.

All of this up to this point has been pretty hopeful, but here's the thing. What he's going to do in verse 16 is he's going to present us with a pretty painful reality, and that's this: many people will still refuse the gospel. Many people have heard the information of the gospel, but it hasn't led to transformation. This is a painful reality.

When I was in college, I had a good friend of mine who very much struggled with the fact that his dad was a Muslim, and he struggled for good reason. A devout Muslim father. My friend would pray for his father, and we would talk about it. I would try to encourage him, and he would share his faith with his father. Well, I found out a couple of years ago that, unfortunately, my friend's dad died having never come to faith, and I learned after this that my friend walked away from the faith because of it.

So, I know this is a very painful reality that Paul is going to be talking about. It's going to be a little bit of a heavy text, but here's the big idea of the entire message. It really can be summarized in one question. I heard a pastor give this to his church over 10 years ago, and it stuck with me. It's very simple. Here's the question: *Is your life marked by obedience rooted in faith?*

I'm not asking if you're perfect, because none of us are perfect, obviously. I'm not asking if you struggle, because all of us at one point or another, pretty much daily, struggle. But when you think about the last week of your life, is your life marked by obedience to God that is rooted in faith? We're going to talk about why this is so important.

We're going to pick up in chapter 10, verse 16. Paul is going to reference four different Old Testament passages. I'll just tell you, we all have to put on our thinking caps together, because these passages are a little bit obscure, not the easiest to understand. But we're going to read the whole passage. It starts here in verse 16.

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'

But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.' Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.' But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"

All right. We'll walk through this. The first thing Paul does is he addresses the painful reality that many Jewish people have refused the gospel. He says in verse 16, ***"But they have not all obeyed the gospel."*** What he's doing here is drawing a connection between faith in the gospel and obedience. The Greek word here for *obeyed* literally means to hear under. He's saying that they have not reoriented their lives around the gospel. They had information but not transformation. They had heard, but they were not heeding.

Think about it this way. Probably once per year, you'll get a notification on your weather app or on your phone somehow, and the notification will say, "Tornado watch," which basically means there might be a tornado. Now, what do you do when you get that notification? Well, you probably don't do anything.

Now, what do you do when your phone buzzes and says, "Tornado warning. Take shelter immediately"? Well, I know what you do, because we all do the same things. We walk to our window, which is the worst place to walk, by the way. We walk to our window, we

look out the window, and then we say, "I think it's going to blow over." The point is you clearly don't believe a tornado is going to be making its way to you or else you would take action. You would go to the basement. You would do the whole mattress thing.

Here's why this matters. Some of you have a friend or a family member, and you're not sure if they are a Christian. You're watching their lives, and you're confused, and you're wondering, "Are they actually a believer?" Then, some of you are here, and you're trying to decide whether or not *you* are a Christian, and we are glad you're here. A very helpful question to consider is "Do I desire to obey God? Do I want to obey God?"

Part of my story is I came to faith at age 9, but once I got to college at UNC Chapel Hill, I grew so quickly. I grew so much so fast that I began to look back on my conversion at age 9, and I wondered if I was actually saved throughout my childhood. I know that this is many of *your* stories. We hear this all the time. As I think back on 9-year-old me and 12-year-old me and 15-year-old me, I have the assurance that I was saved. Why? Because I wanted to obey God. I desired to obey.

We say here often that the Scriptures do a lot of things. They do more than this, but not less than this. The Scriptures will comfort and commend, but they're also going to confront and challenge. You see, when confronted and challenged with what the Bible says about sexuality or alcohol or money, the genuine Christian is going to at least desire to obey what God has said. There's going to be a desire for obedience.

What Paul is saying here is that where there is no obedience, where there is no desire for obedience, then this might suggest that there is no genuine faith. You see, genuine faith means you are hearing under. Let's go back to verse 16. ***"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."***

The last four weeks, if you've been here, we've been in Romans 9, we've been in Romans 10, and we've been in the deepest of deep topics. We've talked about election and divine sovereignty. We've talked about Israel's unbelief and how people reject the gospel and how people receive the gospel. We've talked about global lostness and all these things. Well, since Paul says that faith comes from hearing, that means what Christians have to do is share words.

So, I want to make this super practical for us. If faith comes from hearing the words of the gospel, I want to practically share with you how you share the gospel. I was reminded of the value of this last week when our missionaries were here, because as we were spending time with them... We spent about two days with them over the course of the

weekend. They shared multiple times how a big part of what they would do would be to train local believers how they can share the gospel themselves.

Now, there are multiple ways to do this. You can look up the three circles method online. There are the four spiritual laws. Sometimes people have bracelets that are conversation starters, and they can explain the symbols. What I want to do is give you four truths that you must share if you want to share the full gospel. These are the same four truths I have used for years with college students. You need to know that each of these four truths is accompanied by a lie that our culture will say about the gospel.

The first truth is you must share the *truth about God*. The truth about God is this. We believe that God is the Creator of all things. He is perfectly righteous. God will punish sin. Now, this is different from what culture will tell you about God. Culture will say that God would never punish anybody. Culture will tell you that God is just a distant deity, that he is whoever you want him to be.

What's the one word that culture will use to describe God? They will say God is love, which is true. God *is* love. He's infinitely loving. Everything God does, of course, flows out of his love, but here's what's interesting. Throughout the Scriptures, more so than being described as love, God is described often as holy. In Isaiah, chapter 6, it does not say, "Love, love, love is the Lord God Almighty." It says, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." So, the first truth we have to share is that God is holy.

The second truth is we have to share the *truth about man*. This is where the bad news comes in. The truth about man is that all of us are naturally sinful by nature and choice. Culture will say the opposite. Culture will say that everyone is basically a good person. Everybody is essentially a pretty good person; no one needs to be saved.

We believe the Bible teaches that all of us were sinful by nature and choice. We all, in some way, will reject the Creator. Instead, we will worship the creation. We believe that our sin must be punished, and there's a big, big gap between God's holiness and you and me.

The third truth we have to share is the *truth about Christ*. What culture will tell you is that Jesus was a good man, but they won't tell you that Jesus was the God-man. Culture will tell you that Jesus was just a good, moral teacher, and maybe we can learn a few things from him.

What we believe (this is the good news of the gospel) is that Jesus Christ really lived a perfect life in full obedience to God, and then after living a perfect life that you couldn't live, he died on the cross in our place, taking the wrath of God for us. Then he rose from the dead, showing that he could overcome sin and death.

You see, Jesus (we use this word often here) was our substitute. This is what theologians will call the *great exchange*. The great exchange is that our sin was fully paid for by Jesus on the cross. He absorbed the payment we owed. By faith, his perfect righteousness can then be imputed to us. This is the gospel.

So, that's the third truth about Jesus, but people often will forget the fourth part of the gospel: *there must be a response*. You see, culture will tell you, "There are multiple ways to God. Just pick the way that works best for you, and that'll be great." What we believe is that the Bible teaches God calls everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and trust in Christ in order to be saved.

We heard this last week. Romans 10:9: ***"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*** Anytime you can share any of these truths, you should be encouraged and you should celebrate, especially if you're able to share *all* of these truths.

Now, what Paul is going to do next is he's going to address some of the excuses people might give you for why someone hasn't believed the gospel. The two excuses are these. First, "I never heard." Secondly, "I never understood." He's going to talk about both of these.

Verse 18: ***"But I ask, have they not heard?"*** Paul gives us an answer in the same breath. ***"Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.' But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation...'"*** He's talking about the Gentiles, the outsiders. ***"...I will make you angry."***

So, it says here that the Jewish people did hear the gospel, they did understand the gospel, but they still rejected God. What Paul is doing here is a little bit confusing. In verse 18, he is referencing Psalm 19 as a way to communicate how broadly the gospel had been preached throughout the Jewish communities.

The first question he asks is "Have they not heard?" The answer (you just heard it) is, yes, they *have* heard. Here's the big idea of Psalm 19: God has revealed himself to us. Carl Henry (he was a theologian) said what God has done is he has forfeited his personal privacy by revealing himself to us so that we could know him.

I want to give you two helpful categories for how God reveals himself to us. The first is God reveals his glory to us in his world, and he reveals his grace to us in his Word. So, we'll talk about these. God reveals his glory through his world. The glory of God is when any of God's attributes go public.

Psalms 19 says that by looking up at God's creation, at God's design, all of us are able to see that there is a God and he is powerful. This is what theologians will call *general revelation*. The definition of *general revelation* is it's God's disclosure of himself to all peoples in all places at all times. General revelation comes through creation. It comes through the conscience. It comes through a general knowledge that God exists.

Last week, when Pastor Kyle talked about the so-called innocent man on the island who has never heard about Jesus (by the way, he basically said that doesn't exist), what he said was that this man, of course, doesn't go to heaven. We need to be specific about why this man doesn't go to heaven. If you want to be specific, the man is not condemned because he didn't hear about Jesus; the man is condemned because he suppresses, distorts, and rejects the knowledge of God that he *does* have, which we see in Romans 1.

So, God's glory is revealed through his world, but God's grace is revealed through his Word. This is why Paul says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." God's grace through his Word is what we call *special revelation*. Special or specific revelation is God's specific disclosure of himself through his Word and through the life of Christ.

Now, here's the thing. You know this. Creation can tell you a lot about the glory of God, but creation can't tell you anything about the grace of God or the judgment of God or the forgiveness of God. These things have to come through special revelation. After last week's sermon, like many of you in *your* Community Groups, we talked about this in my group.

As we were talking about the man on the island who never hears, it brought up a question that is actually a very common question that is related to what we're talking about right here: What happens when babies pass away? What happens when those with significant mental disabilities pass away? The question is...*If faith comes from hearing, what happens to those who don't have the capacity to hear?* Which is a very real question.

I understand this is a very sensitive and real topic for many of you. I've had to wrestle with this question myself. I've never shared this publicly, but when I was a student at UNC Chapel Hill, for about a year and a half, I worked about 20 hours a week as a caregiver. The main individual I took care of was a young man in his early 20s with severe cerebral palsy. He couldn't see. He couldn't talk. He couldn't walk. He couldn't respond to commands. He was completely dependent for total care.

Unfortunately, I heard within the last year that he passed away about a year ago. So, when I hear things like this, I have to ask myself the question, "What happens to him?"

Does he go to heaven?" Think about this with me. The man on the island who never hears about Jesus is condemned because he suppresses the truth, and he suppresses the knowledge of the glory of God that he *does* have.

But listen to this. Where there is no knowledge of the truth, there can be no suppression of it. Babies and those with significant mental disabilities are not only unable to understand the grace of God; they are also unable to even understand the glory of God in creation.

John Piper has spoken at length about this. He says this: "The point for us is that even though we human beings are under the penalty of everlasting judgment and death because of the fall of our race into sin and the sinful nature that we all have, nevertheless God only executes this judgment on those who have the natural capacity to see his glory and understand his will and refuse to embrace it as their treasure. Infants, I believe, do not yet have that capacity; therefore, in God's inscrutable way, he brings them under the forgiving blood of his Son."

You see, in a way that's hard for us to understand, we believe that babies, when they do pass away, are saved. They go to heaven somehow because of Jesus. Jesus and his blood of righteousness is what is part of the equation that leads to them being in heaven. Now, I was talking with someone in my Community Group about this exact topic earlier this week, and he brought up a question that many of you are asking or thinking to yourself right now, which is, "When exactly does that change?"

If babies go to heaven and adults, if they don't hear the gospel and repent and believe, *don't* go to heaven, where does that change in the spectrum of a child's upbringing? The answer is that we don't know. It's hard to know. People love to use the phrase *age of accountability*. We don't know when that is, but here's what we do know. This is where we have to trust, especially as parents.

We have to trust, first, that God is perfectly just and loving and can be trusted. However he handles all things, he can be trusted. Secondly, we ought to have a sense of urgency to share the gospel with everyone we have a relationship with, including our children. Paul says, "Faith comes from hearing."

All right. I want to reread verse 19 and reread the question Paul asks. He says, ***"But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.'"*** His question is "Have they not understood?" His answer is a roundabout way of saying, "Yes, they have understood."

You see, the Gentiles were unfamiliar with the laws of God, but many of them ended up coming to faith, whereas the Jewish people were very familiar with God's commandments, but many of them didn't believe. Why? It's because they had religion. They had understanding, but that understanding was without surrender. They had understanding, but they weren't standing under the Scriptures in a posture of submission.

Something I've encountered a lot on the college campus over the years is that college students will say they have doubts about the Christian faith. Many people do have genuine, real doubts. We love to talk about those. We love to answer as many questions that we have. We love to come alongside each other and encourage each other through our doubts.

But from my experience over the years, someone who says they have doubts about what the Bible says usually just has an unwillingness to surrender. Having doubts about what the Bible says is often just an excuse someone will give you when they don't want to change the way they live. The right answer is "I have doubts." The real answer is "I don't want to change the way I live." Or, maybe an even deeper reason is "I don't want to change the way I think. I'm not willing to change my worldview."

The Christian understanding is that we are in full submission to what God has revealed to us in his Word. The problem is not that we have a hearing problem but that we have a heart problem. We are all naturally very resistant to being told what to do. We see this in the lives of our kids. You don't have to teach your child to not want to be told what to do. This happens in our house pretty much every day.

You go to your kids and very graciously and lovingly say, "Children, would you please clean up the playroom?" Then they'll say, "I don't want to," and you'll say, "Well, I don't remember asking if you want to." Right? We naturally don't like being told what to do, and this hinders our ability to surrender to Jesus.

This is a fear I have for our church. This is a fear I have for pretty much anyone who grew up in church or grew up in the South in general, because if that's you, you have a ton of access to the Scriptures. You know the songs. You might even go to a Community Group. You might serve from time to time. You are very familiar with the Christian faith, but it is possible to do all of those things and still never surrender to Jesus.

Paul is saying they had understanding, but they didn't believe. So he's saying, "Don't mistake familiarity with faith." Familiarity with Jesus and faith in Jesus are not the same thing. This might come as a surprise to some of you, but I am not a fan of Taylor Swift. I

know. Surprise, surprise. I'm much more of an Alan Jackson, George Strait, and Brooks & Dunn kind of guy. That's more my thing.

I personally don't really understand the craze, because there are friends I have who know every detail you could imagine about Taylor Swift. They can sing all of the songs. They know all of the album names. They can tell you about all of her ex-boyfriends. They can tell you Travis Kelce's shoe size...I mean, all of these things.

Now, the point, of course, is that they don't know Taylor Swift personally; they just know a lot about her. Paul is saying knowing about someone and knowing someone are not the same thing. The same is true with Jesus. Let's keep going. Verse 20: ***"Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.'"***

Let's talk about seekers. Scripture tells us that God reveals himself to those who do not seek him. Here in verse 20 is essentially the same thing Jesus tells us in Luke, chapter 19, when he says, "I came to seek and to save the lost." It is not that we are looking for God but that God is looking for us, but in the Christian world, we'll use these terms often: *seekers* and *skeptics*.

It's helpful to know that the person who seems to be seeking is often just seeking the benefits God provides without actually seeking God himself. Something that's true of both the rebellious person and the religious person is they often want God's stuff, but they don't want God. They want the peace of God, but they don't want God. They want God's forgiveness, but they don't want God.

So, when God says, "I have been found by those who did not seek me," what this should remind us of is that we are going to have no idea who, across time, the Lord is going to reveal himself to. If God is the one who seeks, that means he is going to draw a variety of people to himself.

You see, what Christians love to debate and discuss is who's a Christian and who's not. We all love to debate. Is Jordan Peterson a Christian? Is Joe Rogan or Justin Bieber or Donald Trump a Christian? Well, those are all questions. We can talk about them, but here's what I know. When we get to heaven, you and I are going to be surprised, and we're going to be surprised on both sides of the spectrum.

We'll get to heaven, and we're going to look in the distance and say, "Is that Uncle Bill? That's Uncle Bill. I can't believe it. Praise the Lord that Uncle Bill made it." But on the other side of things, we're going to be looking around and be like, "I've been here a while. Where's my small group leader from college?" It's like, "I don't know where they

are." You see, we are going to be surprised at who the Lord reveals himself to. Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

I love how Romans 10 ends. Verse 21: **"But of Israel he [God] says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"** Do you notice what it doesn't say here? It doesn't say God is standing there with his arms crossed. It doesn't say he's standing there with his back turned. It doesn't say God is standing there telling you all of the things you need to get right in your life before you come. He's not saying, "Clean yourself up and come." What it says is God is standing there holding out his hands.

This is a picture of forgiveness. The Christian faith revolves around forgiveness. Everything in the Christian faith flows from forgiveness. The New Testament would describe forgiveness as canceling a debt someone owes to you. The way Romans 10 ends is with a hopeful truth, which is that God gives forgiveness to us. God is persistent, and he is patient.

So, some of you may need to be encouraged this morning, because you have someone in your life who is in a season of rebellion. You love this person. They're in rebellion or they're religiously lost, and it's really tough. You need to be encouraged by the fact that God is persistent and patient in that as long as there is breath in their lungs, there is hope for their soul. God is persistent. He's patient.

What some of you might need to do is to receive God's forgiveness personally. Romans 10 ends with an invitation. The end of Romans 10 is actually very similar to how the parable of the prodigal son ends. If you don't know this story, in Luke, chapter 15, there's a parable of the prodigal son. It actually should be called the *parable of the compassionate father* or the *parable of the two lost sons*.

What happens in the story is the younger brother comes to the father, and he basically says to the father, "Dad, I don't want you; I want your stuff." What the father does is he gives the son what he's asking for, and then the son takes it, goes off to a far land, and he rebels. He completely disobeys everything his father has told him his entire life.

He hits rock bottom. He comes back to his father, and he's ready to earn his way back into the family, but what happens is that the father runs to him and embraces his son. He offers him forgiveness, and then he throws a party for his son. It's in the moment when he throws the party for his son that we start to hear about the older brother in the story.

You see, the older brother is very similar to the Jewish people we're reading about in Romans, chapter 10. The older brother is upset that the younger brother is being welcomed in. It says this in Luke 15:28: **"But he..."** The older brother, the one who was self-righteous. **"...was angry and refused to go in. His father came out..."** The father

leaves the house. **"...and entreated him..."** *Entreated* means he came out begging for his son to come in. He's pleading with his son to come into the house.

You see, the father doesn't just go out to the younger brother who's rebellious; he also goes toward the self-righteous older brother, and he says, "Won't you come inside?" Look at this in verse 29: **"...but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat...'"** Religious people think God owes them.

"...that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" Now, I want you to listen here to the heart of the father. It's going to sound very familiar. It says this in verse 31: **"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'"**

You see, what the father is essentially saying is "All day long I have held out my hands." The father is looking to the self-righteous older brother and saying, "Don't you want to come into the party? My hands are outstretched. Don't you want to come in?" Some of you have heard this story, and you're thinking to yourself, "I am the self-righteous person."

For whatever reason, you've been in church for a long time, and you know the Scriptures and the songs, but the knowledge about God has not made its way from your head down to your heart. The invitation of this passage is to surrender. It's to come home to the heart of the Father.

You see, God gives forgiveness *to* us, but he also gives forgiveness *through* us. God gives forgiveness through us in two ways. The first way is that we, as believers, are quick to forgive those who have sinned against us. Some of you here, for whatever reason, have a very difficult time forgiving those who have sinned against you, even those who have apologized and repented and asked for forgiveness. You just have the hardest time.

How do you know if that is you? Well, I know how. You're bitter. You're just low-level bitter all the time, and unfortunately, you're bringing your bitterness with you everywhere you go. It's coming into all of your relationships. You're thinking about it all the time. You're talking about it all the time.

I have some good news for you. You don't have to carry that bitterness forever. You see, forgiven people forgive people. It has been said that to forgive is to set the prisoner free and to realize that prisoner was you. Who do you need to forgive?

The second way God gives forgiveness through us is that he uses us to share his forgiveness with other people. Many of you were here last week when our missionaries were here. The guy missionary... Let's call him Jay. He was here with us, and he was telling a story about when he was imprisoned for over a month in South Asia.

He told us that the day they got arrested, they were taken into an interrogation room with a police chief who was this massive 6'4", 280-pound guy. He said the police chief was interrogating him and his friend. As the chief was interrogating his friend, the friend gave him a response he didn't like, so the police chief rears back and slaps his friend in the face. The friend's face is swollen and blue. He can't sleep that night.

Well, Jay told us that over a month later, right before they were released, for some reason they had to meet with the police chief again. Jay told us that in that moment, he felt like God was clearly calling him to share the gospel with that police chief, to share about God's forgiveness with him, and he thought to himself, "I do not want to do this."

But he told us that what he did is he used his friend who was slapped to translate as he shared the gospel with the police chief. He told us, "The police chief didn't come to faith, but I was grateful that I had the opportunity to share about God's forgiveness with this man." You see, God gives forgiveness *to* us, but he also gives it *through* us.

Would you bow your heads with me? With your heads bowed across all of our campuses, I just want to ask or re-ask one question: Is your life marked by obedience rooted in faith? God tells us, "All day long I have held out my hands." God has done his part. God has removed every obstacle.

For some of you, your life is marked by knowledge but not surrender. So, I'll ask you right now... What area of your life is the Lord asking you to obey and surrender? Maybe it's related to your future. Maybe it's something with money. Maybe it's your family. Maybe it's some big decision you need to make. In just a moment, I'm going to ask you to come forward and pray about it.

Some of you need to be freed from bitterness and unforgiveness. You're tired of feeling bitter. I know it, and I want to encourage you to cancel the debt. In just a moment, I'm going to invite you to come forward and bring this before the Lord. Some of you are burdened by an unbeliever in your life. Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a family member. Your next step of obedience is to share the Lord's forgiveness with them. In just a moment, I'm going to invite you to come forward to pray for them and to pray for the courage to have that conversation.

Father, I thank you that you are persistent and patient. Father, we need your help in all these things. Would you help us to surrender all aspects of our lives to you, Lord? I thank

you for the fact that you have made forgiveness free to us. You have made it available to us through the person of Jesus. Lord, I pray that we would receive it by faith. I pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.