

JUDE: The error of Balaam

JUDE, The Call to Stand

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I want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to two very specific places, the book of Jude which is the second to the last book of the Bible and the book of Numbers, the book of Numbers way back in the Old Testament, Numbers 22. If you're a first time guest or visitor with us today, we continue in a message series and a sermon series walking through this very short, as far as quantity is concerned, but powerful as far as quality is concerned, book of the Bible, the book of Jude, only 25 verses in length. It may take up one, maybe two pages in your Bible and today we continue with just a phrase out of verse 11 which is derived from a story back in the book of Numbers which takes 9-10 chapters to unpack. That's why today we're going to spend the majority of our time in the book of Numbers. What we've got to do is unpack this phrase that's in the book of Jude 11.

As you're looking for those passages of Scripture, one of the things that we're trying to address in this message series is the need for believers in Jesus Christ to stand, the need for us to be godly in a world that seems to be ever increasing more and more ungodly. The desire to be righteous in a world of unrighteousness. To do what verse 3 in the book of Jude says: to contend or to fight or to stand for the faith that once delivered unto the saints. And today I've entitled the message "Potential, Part 2." We addressed last week, the way of Cain there in verse 11 and this idea that if we would be who God has called us to be, there is unlimited potential to what we could see happen in our lives, in the church's life and in the kingdom of God's life.

Today we continue that stream of thought with a phrase that's tucked in the book of Jude 11, this next phrase that we'll address in just a moment. But today's potential is not like last week. We're not dealing with what would happen if all of our resources were actually dedicated to the Lord, the ministries and things we would see. Today's potential is to see what would happen if individuals, if families and if churches would take a stand for the things of God that are outlined today in the book of Jude and the book of Numbers, we would see the potential that we have to see a culture that has gone completely chaotic be re-centered to the things of God.

I want to share an opening story that takes us back 1,600 years. Go all the way back to the year 404 AD, there was a small hermit of a man that lived out in the countryside by

the name of Telemachus. He was a genteel man, he was a soft-mannered man. He was a man that was faithful in his faith but to our record, had never publicly preached a sermon. He had never led a conference or a Bible study. He was a very private man, in fact, many people called him a hermit. One day in early 404 AD, he decided to make his way to the grand city of Rome, the city that was set on the seven hills, the city that in those days, literally ruled the entire world. This man of faith descended upon the city and he was in shock and awe of what he saw. He saw godlessness, debauchery and what the book of Jude says “lasciviousness.” He saw it everywhere that he looked but as he began to look around, he noticed that the crowds by the tens of thousands were heading their way to what we now know as the Roman Coliseum. He began to do as the old phrase says: when in Rome do as the Romans do. This was an area he had heard of but nothing he had ever experienced.

He made his way into the Coliseum and because he was one of the last attendees, he found himself in what we call the nose-bleed section. He was up at the very top and had no idea what he was really about to witness and before his eyes, he was shocked to see what we know as the gladiator matches. He saw before his eyes men literally killed and had their life taken out of them, not just in front of him but to the cheers of the crowd that was some 50,000 strong. This man was devastated that this culture that had gotten so chaotic, it had become so violent and lascivious and full of debauchery that this would not only be allowed but it would be celebrated. Does it sound like the culture we live in today? It's not just that things are occurring, it's not that things are being allowed but it seems like we've become a culture that is celebrating the lasciviousness.

He began to shout out; he began to holler. He began to try to get somebody's attention that this must stop. To no avail. As time went on, he began to make his way closer to the actual arena in which they were fighting. In history, and legends shares with us that he got to the point where he was leaning over the rail of the arena. As they were taking another's life, he began to scream and to shout. Nobody paid attention. So finally, in an act of sheer desperation, in the middle of a gladiatorial match, he jumped out in the arena, he put his hands up and history and legend shares with us that he uttered this phrase, “Stop the madness.” To which in the next few seconds, one of the gladiators took his sword and ended his life and spilled his blood right there in the arena except this time, there was no celebration. This time, there was no whooping and hollering and history tells us that it wasn't many days later that the gladiator events ceased and stopped.

The potential of one person, the potential of one family, the potential of one church that gets into the arena of the madness of this culture and says, “Stop the madness.” That's what we're going to deal with today. The potential that we have in the arenas that God has put us in to see the chaos and the madness cease. As we go to the book of Jude 11, it's a very simple phrase that we have here. It says in verse 11, it begins with, “Woe unto.” Anytime God says “woe” you'd better pay attention. He's giving us illustrations from the Old Testament of areas that we need to be cautious of and make sure we don't go down the same paths. Last week we addressed, “Woe unto you who go the way of Cain.” Then it begins in verse 11, “and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.”

Now, I want you to go ahead and turn to the book of Numbers 22 and we're going to pick up this story about a famous prophet by the name of Balaam. You probably most likely know him from the story that we're going to allude to a little bit today. This was a man of God, that God shared with him some information, he neglected to hear it properly, he refused and rebelled against the things of God, found himself riding a donkey on the wayside when the angel of the Lord appears. The angel of the Lord appears and the donkey gets scared. The donkey literally sees the presence of God and Balaam the prophet doesn't. The donkey stops, Balaam gets off, beats him three times to no avail and then finally he sees the angel of the Lord and Balaam the prophet repents.

The story of Balaam is about his personal story but more importantly, between chapters 22 and 31 of the book of Numbers, we see a picture of the people of God, the Israelites, the chosen of God, those that were walking with God, those that were righteous. Godliness is abundant and godlessness is small but in these chapters we see the chaos take over. We see the madness take over and what I want us to learn today is this: how do we understand the potential that we have to not go the error of Balaam and see what it would do and how it would change our lives.

I want to begin by looking at the book of Numbers 22, picking it up in verse 12. Now, understand what has happened here, just so you'll know the characters involved, is there is a king who opposes Israel. His name is Balak. He wants to destroy them but he has a problem: he is out-numbered, he is out-manned and he is out-financed. So, he understands that there is a prophet by the name of Balaam who speaks on behalf of God to his people. He has summoned Balaam into his presence with this request: that this man of God speak against the people of God and actually curse them. We pick up the story in verse 12,

“12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. 13 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you. 14 And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us. 15 And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. 16 And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: 17 For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. 18 And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. 19 Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more. 20 And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. 21 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 And God's anger was kindled because he went.”

Obviously, the rest of that story is that famous donkey event that I mentioned with the scene of the angel of the Lord but what I want to share with you beginning in this story and continuing, are some certain markers that I think we need to understand, some certain that I think we need to address. The first one is this: the downfall, and when I say the downfall, how is it that a people of God who could not be cursed all of a sudden became a people of God that found themselves again in somewhat of a bondage situation? We'll deal with that in just a moment. And what this gives a picture to us is that as an individual, as a family, as a church, as a community, as a country, as a civilization, what creates the downfall? How do we go from God-loving to God-despising? How do we go from righteousness to lasciviousness? How does this occur?

Well, the first thing you need to understand is this: it's progressive. Rome did not fall in a day and neither do you. It is a progressive process in your life. And in the life of Balaam, we actually see some steps of the unfortunate progression. You see, the first step of your downfall, the first step of your family's downfall, the first step of a civilization's downfall when it comes to our relationship with the Lord is this: step #1 is when we begin to second-guess God, when we begin to think that God doesn't know what he's doing and we know better. Or maybe the person we've talked to or the thing we desire, or the situation we're in, has more precedence over the things of God.

Let me share with you how this happens in Balaam's life. Verse 20, this is chapter 22, "And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." Verse 21, "And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass." Now, you find for me where those guys ever showed up? God came and said, "Here's the deal: if they show up, go with them." Did they show up? Not according to those verses so that morning, Balaam woke up, he got his morning coffee and said, "You know what? Maybe God didn't quite understand how to do this thing called life. I don't think God knew best in this situation so I'm just going to go ahead and do the thing I want to do." That is the first step of the downfall. When we decide that either ourselves or somebody else or the situation around us is of better knowledge than what God has communicated for us. That's the first step of the downfall.

The second step is this: we not only second-guess God, we then begin to spend time with the opposing forces to God. Now remember, there are two principle characters here: there is Balak, the king, and there is Balaam, the prophet. Balak, bad. Balaam, good. We got those, right? What we see next is: Balak gets very upset. He wants the people of God to be cursed but Balaam will not do it and so when we go to the end of chapter 22, we see somewhat of a progression here. From verse 39, at Balak's request, it says,

"39 And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto," a place that none of us know how to pronounce, "40 And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him. 41 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the

high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.”

Here, Balaam goes to an idolatrous place with a wicked king for the purpose of that king saying, “Can you not see it from my perspective? These people are mighty. These people are great. I need you to curse them.”

Once again, Balaam refuses to curse them. We pick up the story in chapter 23:13,

“13 And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me,” listen, “unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.”

So, Balak takes him up to hill #2 and says, “Obviously, you did not learn your lesson, Balaam. These people are strong, they are mighty, I want to defeat them. You couldn't see all of them from there so let me take you to a secondary vantage point.” Once again, Balaam says, “I can't do it. I cannot curse them.”

So, we continue in verse 27 of chapter 23,

“27 And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.”

He literally says to Balaam, “I think your God will actually be happy if you do this for me.”

Verse 28,

“28 And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.”

Three different times over a period of time, this “prophet of God” by the name of Balaam, allowed himself to be subjected to, allowed himself to be the object of an individual who wanted to destroy the things of God. He spends time with him and he doesn't learn his lesson. He goes to place 1, place 2, place 3 continually. He knows that God cannot and will not curse them but the problem is, he begins to spend time with the opposition of God and this is the progress of your downfall.

A downfall occurs when we first second-guess God and secondly, we begin to spend time with the things that are contrary to God. But there's a last step, there's a final step to the downfall and I want to show it to you in chapter 25:1, it says,

“1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. 2 And they called the people unto

the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. 3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.”

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, “How on earth did this occur?” How did a group of people that everything was going so well, how did a group of people that had a prophet that said, I cannot curse you, how did they find themselves in a position that if you continue reading in chapter 25, says there were plagues upon them and dozens of thousands of people were killed from the plague. You say, “How on earth does that occur?”

We pick up the story later and for the sake of time, we won't delve into it but in chapter 31, we're given commentary on what happened between Balaam and Balak. Specifically in verse 16, it says that at some point – now remember, he has second-guessed God, he has gone where he shouldn't have gone, he has spent time with Balak the king and I believe that the third and the final step in the downfall of anyone, family or church or community or civilization's spirituality is when they begin to sympathize with the opposition. When we allow feelings to trump facts. When we allow emotions to overshadow the harsh reality.

In chapter 31, it says that Balaam and Balak have an official meeting and basically this is how it goes: he says, “Balak, I see your points. I think you're being persecuted. I think you're in a bad spot. Do you know what? Those Israelite, they've been too blessed by God too long. They've got too much. They've got too much power, too much stuff. I think you're right. I think everybody just needs to get a leg up, particularly you so I'm going to help you out here. I cannot curse them because they're borne of God but,” and this is in chapter 31, this is what Balaam tells him, “If you and I together will convince them to have,” as the Bible says, “whoredoms with the Moabites, it will tear the whole thing up.”

You see, that's the progress. They went from a people that were blessed by God to a people who were dying of plagues sent by God. That was the progression. That was the downfall. But it's not just a progression, in fact, what we see is: it's absolutely very precise. When I use the word “precision,” understand there's a lot of different definitions that go with that word. For some of you, when you go out duck hunting and you hit a bird with a 12 gauge, that was a precise shot. I'm not speaking of duck hunting here, I'm speaking of the precision of a neurosurgeon with a scalpel, where literally the difference in millimeters means the difference between life and death. And what I'm about to share with you is this: the devil hasn't invented any new tricks in millennium. He doesn't have to. Do you know why? We keep falling for the same tricks over and over and over again. Why would he come up with something new if that which is already working is working so well?

And what we see happening here in the book of Numbers is an absolute precise, almost like a scalpel of how the enemy creeps in and takes a people who were dedicated to the things of God and causes them to do what chapter 25 says, “commit whoredoms and fall under the curse of plagues.” Let me tell you what the precision was not: in Balaam's life,

Balak's life and even if we were going to pull away the curtain, the devil's existence, please understand that in no shape or form, when it comes to the downfall of you, your family, a country or a civilization or even a church, please understand that the devil does not have the capacity to change the facts. He can't do it. I've got news for you: it doesn't matter what you believe, 2+2 is 4. You cannot change that fact.

Now, let me transition a little bit: nobody, I don't care how smart they are, intelligent they are or how wise they appear, nobody can change the fact that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. You can't change that. You cannot change the fact that in 33 ½ years of life on earth, he never fell into temptation and sin. You cannot change that fact. You can't change the fact that he walked on water, he healed the sick, he calmed the storm and he fed 5,000 people with some bread and some fish. You cannot change the facts. You can't change the fact that he was put on a cruel cross. You cannot change the fact that three days later the tomb was empty. You cannot change the fact that some day, please Lord Jesus, he's coming back. You cannot change the facts.

You do realize that Balaam couldn't change the facts. He could not make a people blessed by God cursed by God. He could not change the facts. Folks, we can perfume the pig all we want but you can't change the facts. The other things we realize is this: that the devil, that Balaam, Balak and you, cannot change the faith. What I mean by that is we cannot come up with our own rules for the faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible makes it very clear: whoever calls on the name of the Lord can be and will be saved. We can't change the rules of faith. We cannot change the rules of faith that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life. Nobody comes to the Father but by me." We may not like the faith, but we cannot change the facts of the faith. We cannot change the faith that says in John 10, that we are in the palm of his hand and nobody or nothing can take us out.

Folks, we cannot change the facts, we can't change the faith so what did the devil do in the book of Numbers? How did he destroy a people who claimed faith in God? How did he destroy these people? And listen, with the precision of a scalpel from a neurosurgeon. Listen to me: he went after the one thing that he knew would shred the rest, he went after the family. He went after their homes. He went after their marriages. He went after their children. He went after the four walls that they put their pillow in at the end of the night. You do realize that the very first institution that God established was the family and from that point forward, the devil has desired to manipulate and work his way to destroy it. Why? Because when you destroy a family, they don't practice their faith very much, do they? When you destroy a family, rarely if ever do they acknowledge or admit to the facts that are presented in the word of God.

So, with absolute precision of a scalpel in this story. He could not take a blessed people and make them cursed. He could not take the covenant that God had given with them and somehow change it. But here's what he said, "If I can come in through the flank position or the side route, if I'll go in and convince them that the grass is greener on the other side, I'll convince them that they're not experiencing all the aspects of life. I'll convince them, there can be a better way than what they're experiencing. I will convince them that doing the things of God is ancient and archaic and prudish and square and out of date."

Then what happens in chapter 25? It says that they began to experiment with the people of Moab. And then it says they began to worship their gods. And then it said that they had plagues upon them. You see, this is the downfall. This is how it occurs. Not just in our culture and our society but even in our very homes. That's the downfall.

The second thing we need to learn from this story is this: what is this error of Balaam that there's also damage that takes place? There is damage in our lives, there is damage in our culture when this downfall occurs. Now, back to chapter 25 of the book of Numbers. Once again, we notice that it is progressive, that the damage that happens among the Israelites, the people of God, did not literally happen overnight, it happened over a process of time. It says in verse 1, "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab, they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." And if you read the whole story, later on in verse 8, "so the plague was stayed from the children of Israel."

Let me tell you the three progressive steps of the damage that occurs in our lives, our family's life, our church's life, our culture's life, our civilization's life, when we begin to second-guess God, hang out with the world and sympathize with them. Damage #1: there will be a perversion. Now, those of you that have not been with us for the last couple of weeks, please understand the word "perversion" means "to take something and use it differently than it was originally intended." Look in verse 1: the Israelites go and allow themselves to have relationships with the Moabites. You say, "What is so significant about this?" God said not to. That's why. But I know what you do, you begin to sympathize and say, "But why not? The Moabite ladies were so attractive. Didn't the Lord understand that they were beautiful to look upon?" You notice how we come up with all these excuses? You remember what excuses are, right? They're armpits, they all stink. And what happens is, with the progress of the damage, it always begins with a perversion. When we second-guess God and spend time in the world, we automatically begin to say, "You know what? I know this is how God said to do it but I don't like the way he said to do it and so we want to do it differently."

That's exactly what happens in verse 1. It says they go and they're with the Moabite women, the Lord told them not to be with the Moabites, only to be with the Israelites, so then what happens? It wasn't just about the "perversion," the second thing that we see happen in verse 2 and I know this is a big Scrabble word but there was a proselytization. You say, "What does that mean?" When you proselytize somebody that means you take them from one belief and transform them to another. You take them from one way of thinking into another. You do remember that it is the Israelites that said, "Here O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." What did they do in verse 2? They began to worship the gods of the Moabites. They began to sympathize and worship on Baalpeor and all kinds of worship that was contrary to the things of God.

You see, sometimes when we look at a situation, whether it's in a marriage relationship or a home environment or when it comes to morals and ethics, you know, sometimes we sit and say, "You know, why doesn't God have bigger parameters?" Have you ever thought of that? I have. "Why didn't God just give us a little more leeway, a little more space?" I'm going to tell you why: because he knows the more space we have, the more prone we are to idolatry. And when they took their own space, it was no longer about the God of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it became about the god of the Moabites and the god of this ite and the god of that ite.

So, what occurred was that the perversion led to a proselytization which ultimately led to a plague. Now, think about that word "plague." Go back to the book of Exodus. Do you know what a plague is? Divine judgment. Not just merely the consequences of sin, literally the hand of God touching water and turning it into blood. The hand of God bringing the frogs and the gnats, the darkness, the firstborn. This is the next time the word "plague" is used after what we know as the famous Exodus events. The Lord said that because they went their own way, because they decided to make up their own rules, a divine plague was brought upon them and death. Listen, when the Bible says the wages of sin is death, does that mean spiritual death and hell for those who don't believe in Jesus? Absolutely. But the wages of sin is also sometimes the death of relationship, the death of a future, the death of finances, the death of emotion, the death of security or sometimes even physical death. Folks, that is the progression. That is the damage that happened. Now, listen: it began with a simple desire to expand our borders. Let's do things a little differently. Where did it get them? It got them with a divine plague upon them.

But I want to show you the precision. How did this occur? I mean, what is the scalpel here? What is the cutting that allowed this? And you need to go back to chapter 22 of the book of Numbers and I want to address what I believe is the very precise way that the enemy causes damage in our home, our marriages, our families, even our churches and our culture. I want you to notice the only thing that Balaam says will not trip him up. Now, let me give you a little piece of advice: when a man preaches about the most typically is what he struggles with the most. Verse 18, "And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more." Hmm, you ever wonder what happened to Balaam after chapter 25? I can tell you what happened: he got a house full of silver and gold.

You know, last week we talked about the way of Cain and we talked about those firstfruits, those 10% are giving and worshiping to the Lord. Let me tell you: I think that's important and I advocate it in all ways as I do in my family but I'm going to tell you the precise way the devil messes up most homes is the other 90%. The resources and the finances that he uses. They let, caused Balaam to do this: silver and gold. Now, I'm not a licensed professional counselor, however, I have lost count of the number of couples and families that have come into my office at some point in time and said, "Our lives are a wreck." I've had people come with bags packed in the car. I've gone into people's homes and I've seen people throw plates and cups at each other. I've heard people cussed out.

I've seen people run out. I haven't seen it all but I've come very close. Do you know what? In all of those situations, in all of those scenarios, when you begin to peel back the onion, do you know that problem that you find? Money. Absolutely. What caused Balaam to trip up? Money. What causes your family to be a wreck? Money.

I know what you're thinking, "No, no, no, our problem is communication." Yeah, communication about money. "No, no, Pastor, you don't understand. Our problem is she doesn't respect me." She doesn't respect you with the money. I get this. Your say, "Well, he doesn't love me unconditionally." That's right, he does not love you unconditionally with the money. I know how this works. Why? Because I want to tell you: in the hundreds and hundreds of couples and families and people that I've dealt with, please hear me clearly, that in my ministry experience which is not the most vast but it's getting closer by the day, I've only known three families to get wrecked by something other than at the root the love of money.

Let me tell you what happens: there is a certain lifestyle we want so we'll sacrifice everything to do it. There is a certain object that we feel like we cannot live without and we will cause others to suffer without it. And we have caused stress and strain and chaos and what has happened is that the love of money caused Israel to go into whoredom and the love of money is wrecking the family in this culture. We so want and think we need and desire that we would rather split up than fix it up.

Now folks, here's the deal: it's precise, it's a scalpel and it hurts. Let me tell you something: the Meyers family, Tracy and me, we've been married 18 years. We've got problems and most of them go back to money. You say, "Why are you telling us that?" Because it's your life too. You fall into the same traps. We fall into the same traps. If you want to see us get upset with the kids, just see a money trouble come up. If we're short-tempered with each other, basically at the root of it, somewhere money has been involved. If there's a communication problem, I promise you there is a bill problem somewhere. Why? Because if you peel away the layers, what happens is the devil hasn't changed his ways. He got Balaam to bite on the silver and gold and he gets you to bite on the silver and the gold.

Folks, when we allow him to do so, when we want a lifestyle, when we want a place in society, when we want a certain object or a thing, what will we do? We'll allow that which should be the most important to us to get wrecked and ravaged. How did the devil do it? He went directly into the home of the Israelites and he did it with the promise of fortune to the prophet who could not curse them. It's an eerie story that's getting replayed time after time again.

Which leads to this final point: what is the decision that you need to make? What is the decision that we need to make after hearing the illustration from God's word today? The decision is simply this, I know you're going to be surprised it's progressive. It's absolutely progressive. There are some of you here this morning, you know exactly what the problem is, you know exactly what is going on in your life and in your marriage, in your home and in your family, in your four walls and I know what's going to happen. You're

thinking to yourself, “You know what? When that invitation time comes, I’m going to run to the front and I’m going to fall on the steps, I’m going to cry and weep like a baby.” Guess what? It may not be solved by two o'clock this afternoon. You see, sometimes the consequences and sometimes the reality takes a while to flesh out. You do not get out of \$60,000 worth of debt in two days. It doesn't happen. It takes time. A marriage that hasn't talked to one another in six months doesn't become a honeymoon again in six hours. It doesn't happen. It takes time. Here's the problem: we're a society that says, “I want it now!” Three minutes in the drive-through is just too slow, isn't it? They ought to do it in two.

You know, I mention all the different families, couples and such: some years ago, I think to me in all the couples that I’ve dealt with, to me it's one of the saddest stories. It was a young couple, early 30s, two beautiful babies, all the potential in the world. Five years of marriage down the line and they are at wit's end. I mean, it did go back to money. There were lots of issues, lots of struggles, on the verge of bankruptcy. All kinds of problems led to communication issues, led to trust issues. It led to everything. They were literally on the fritz. When they came in, the young lady was there and her husband and as we began to talk about the fact that God could heal their marriage, that God could heal their family, that their kids could become teenagers and never have a clue of what happened when they were in diapers. I'll never forget that day when she looked at me and she said, “Pastor, how long do you think it's going to take?” I said, “Ma'am, I don't know.” I said, “God is a God of miracles. It could take three minutes, I don't know.” I said, “But just being a realist, I think you're looking at about 18-24 months.” I'll never forget her looking me in the eyes and she said, “I don't have that much time. I don't have that much time.”

Do you know that in the Old Testament, it took 49 years to build the temple and we don't have 18 months to heal a marriage? It took 49 years to build the house of God and we don't have three years to fix our family. You see folks, we need to learn the lesson from history. It's going to take time but it also needs to be very precise and when I say precise this is what I mean: I know that today as we've gone through the word of God and addressed various issues, that every one of us at some point, at some level, has heard, witnessed, read or thought something led by the Holy Spirit in our life that needs to alter and change and listen, it needs to be precise. You do not need to leave here today and say, “You know what? We need to fix things in the home. Yup, let's just get them fixed.” You know that will get you nowhere, right? It needs to be precise.

So, for those of you who need help with precision, let me help you. Some of you today are living together and you're not married. Get married. I know what some of you are thinking, “Whoa, whoa, whoa, you understand it's cheaper to live together. We can't afford...” Ah-ha, you didn't think it was about money, did you? Amazing how money issues trump our moral, ethical issues. There are some of you today that your marriage hasn't been good for a long time and you know good and well you need to go to marriage counseling. You know that you need to sit down, you need to hammer it out, you need to have some good come to Jesus meetings with your spouse, your kids or both. I know what some of you are thinking, “I don't have time or the money for that.” Ah-ha.

Let me give you some advice and wisdom and this may scare some of you: your Pastor and his wife have been to marriage counseling twice. Once it was a full engine make-over, the other time it was just an oil change but we've been twice. Why? I'll tell you why: because I'm not going to let the devil wreck my home so why let him wreck yours? Folks, it's easy to watch the news in the morning and get mad about the White House. It's easy to watch and get mad about the House of Congress, mad about the school house. Folks, we need to be concerned about our house because if our house would get right with God, maybe the White House would get right with God.

So, here's the question, whatever the precise instrument is: would you this day make a decision? It doesn't matter how long it takes, how much it hurts. I know the issue and I want God very specifically to address it. Now, before our time of invitation, please hear me very clearly: all the counseling in the world won't fix your family's life if Jesus isn't in the middle of it. All of the debt reduction in the world will not solve your finances if Jesus isn't in the center of it.

So, let's go to step 1: if you're here today in the midst of all the issues of life, there has never been a time and a place where you've said, "You know what? I need Jesus to be in the middle of this." Let me encourage you in just a moment to do so. During our time of invitation you have the opportunity to put Jesus in the middle of all of it so then God begins to work in and through it.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that person today, maybe you're that individual, it doesn't matter your age, it doesn't matter your gender, it doesn't matter your background but maybe you're that person today who would say, "You know what? In all the things I've tried in life to fix the things of life, I've left out the key ingredient of life and that's the giver of life, Jesus Christ." Maybe you're that person today. Here's what I'd encourage you to do: not out loud, not necessarily exactly what I say, I just encourage you to have a conversation with God, technically we call it prayer. And maybe your prayer or conversation would go a little something like this. It doesn't matter if you're here in our worship center, listening on the internet, watching on tv but maybe you have a little talk with God that goes a little like this: you say, "Lord, I realize today that I've allowed life to be all messed up. I've got carnage everywhere. I've got destruction everywhere and I realize a lot of that reason is because I've never allowed Jesus Christ to be at the center of it all." You say, "God, I come today knowing that I've messed up. That's the easy part. God, the hard part is confessing that only Jesus can solve this. So, I come confessing that I'm the sinner and Jesus is the Savior. I come confessing that I'm the one who is wayward and he is the one who is righteous. So, I'm asking the Lord, I am pleading that today you would take my sin, you would forgive it, you would take my soul, you would save it and you would take my future and you would guarantee it. Not because I have or ever will be good enough, talented enough or smart enough but because Jesus Christ loved me enough when he gave his blood for me. In the best way I know how this day, I want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed. You may be that person today who in just a moment as we stand and sing needs to step out and step forward and talk to

somebody. We'll have plenty of people here. Maybe you're that couple today, maybe you're that single today, maybe you're that family today. I don't know what it may be but if this day the Lord has impressed upon you something that needs to change very precisely, it may need you stepping out and stepping forward. It may just need you changing when you step out. Would this be the day where you make the decision that you're not going to allow the devil to have the victory anymore?

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of invitation, an opportunity for us to respond to how you've revealed yourself to us, Lord, we stand here with all the potential in the world to see all the change in all the world. But Lord, we confess that we've got to let you be at the center of it all so help us, O God, at this time to respond appropriately to you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray.