

# Lessons From Sunday Dinner pt 1: Cold Cruel Legalism

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**Bible Text:** Luke 14:1-6  
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Grab your Bibles and to to Luke 14. We continue in the gospel of Luke and we come to a new section beginning in chapter 14 where our Lord is having Sunday dinner with the Pharisees. Now, I know it's the Sabbath, that's not Sunday, but I'm using that as figure of speech because our Sunday, the Lord's Day, has replaced the Jewish Sabbath and actually, there are several different things he's going to teach and say at this interesting setting where he's feasting at what was probably a sumptuous, bountiful meal with his avowed enemies who hated him. That's rather interesting, isn't it? And so he's going to eat at this Pharisee's house and we'll have several messages from the discourse he gives at this dinner. I was going to preach it all at one time but it just wouldn't happen. Alright?

Luke 14, beginning in verse 1 and going through verse 6,

“1 It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. 2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?' 4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away. 5 And He said to them, 'Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?' 6 And they could make no reply to this.”

Lessons From Sunday Dinner, part 1, is today's message. I've entitled “Cold Cruel Legalism.” Cold Cruel Legalism and that's what we see here. First of all, notice the set-up: I. The set-up. That's what I'm convinced this is, the text doesn't state it but I think it's strongly implied that these Pharisees are, in effect, trying to entrap the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a trap. They want to try to discredit him, catch him in some sin, in some way cause this great popularity and esteem that he's gaining to be diminished.

Verse 1 says he goes into the house of this Pharisee to eat bread. The phrase there “to eat bread” does not mean as you and I might think about eating bread, which means we have a little loaf of bread and we share a little loaf together. No, eat bread was most likely a phrase used to represent a sumptuous and bountiful meal and that's what typically

happened at the leader of the Pharisee's house on the Sabbath afternoon. Here we have something interesting, I think, and that is how Luke loves to point out the pure humanity of Jesus in social settings. Luke loves to point out that Jesus was prone to go places and do things and enjoy things that most of us would yet, of course, always without sin. Of course, this was on the Sabbath, the text tells us.

Now, the Sabbath day was a day when families had the biggest meal of the week. People were very poor but the leader of the Pharisee's of any community would have been quite wealthy and his sumptuous meal on the Sabbath would be something of a spectator event. A number of people, first of all, would be gathered in and invited but others would just like to sit around and just watch it. I mean, they didn't have ESPN; they had to do something so this was kind of the social gathering of the week for that community. Unfortunately, too many in this day as in our day, participated in the Lord's Day driven not by a heart that loved God but by a stomach that loved food. Is that the way some of you are today? This day is special to you because Mom or Grandmomma cooks the big meal? Nothing wrong with that, I enjoy that when Mom or Grandmomma fixes a big meal but we've got something better than roast and turnip greens and white beans and corn bread, as good as that is. We have something far better. On this day, they had the Lord present and they missed him completely.

Now, Jesus has already numerous times pointedly, powerfully embarrassed and rebuked these Pharisees already. It's almost like they're gluttons for punishment. I don't know any other way to put it, it's so graphically clear in the gospels that Jesus never pulled any punches with these guys. Not only just the Pharisees though they got the brunt of his rebukes, the people in common got so many reproofs and rebukes because they were on the wrong track. He wasn't trying to be a hard preacher, he was trying to save their souls and sometimes when you're stuck in the strongholds and bondages of wrong thinking about religion, it takes startling, harsh jolts to get your thinking out of that and that's what he does. So, he's already been doing that to these Pharisees over and over again and on this occasion, knowing what they were probably up to, a crafty entrapment, he's being set up, nevertheless, he does not decline to associate with these guys. Whether it's despised tax collectors or evil envious Pharisees, Jesus hung out with them from time to time.

Now, I'm convinced these guys have a scenario, that is the Pharisees, they're trying to entrap him but even if it wasn't planned, I know their hearts delighted in how things unfolded because they thought they would catch Jesus. Verse 1 says "they were watching him closely." The back-drop, of course, is this is the Sabbath day. The Sabbath was one of the laws of Israel that you must keep the Sabbath, honor the Lord on the Sabbath, you cannot work on the Sabbath day. It's probably the law that they gloried in the most and these religious leaders were hypocrites and they would find ways so that they would outwardly externally fulfill the law and then they would heap burdens upon those under their spiritual oversight. So, these Pharisees were those who strictly observed the Sabbath in their bodies, their outward life, but their hearts deeply profaned the Sabbath. Here they silently with crafty wicked hearts are ruminating on how to catch and even destroy the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a word of application, I think, in here for us: you and I have to remember that if we are genuine believers and we are striving to be a genuinely true church, never perfect but striving to be true, then we can bank on it that in every generation, in every town and even in every church, there's always going to be those who look to Christ with suspicion and with questioning. They don't look to him with yielded, treasuring, submissive honor. They look at Jesus but they look to him with suspicion. That's the way the Pharisees looked at him. They look at him with evil hearts and the tragic result of that type of looking at Jesus is that it hardens your heart and as you grow more and more hardened, you also become more and more blinded and dulled in your spiritual perceptions. Convinced that they are righteous, they first miss the truth of who Christ is and what his ministry is and then, secondly, they oppose it and that chronological effect is true for every culture, every people of every town or every age. Those who begin by scrutinizing and questioning and evaluating Jesus as if they are his judge go from that scrutinizing to a domino falls, a straw breaks the camel's back and then they begin to oppose him and the whole time they think they're righteous. They think they're serving God by doing that and the day will come when these type people are hardened to an unsaveable state and they are confirmed in wickedness.

Now, again, the Sabbath feast is occurring. Jesus has been invited to eat at the home of these Pharisees, his arch-enemies, publicly announced that they're his enemies, he said it and they privately said it. And there is a man there, the text tells us, who has the dropsy. This man is sitting right in front of Jesus. You have to know that this was set-up. Now, dropsy was a disease whereby your body cannot emit the water and you swell up. It's an awful thing and it was much worse in this day when they didn't have any medications to ward off the effects. Usually it's the result of congestive heart failure and so this pathetic, ill man is before the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees are ruminating and licking their chops thinking, "I think we've got him this time." They're thinking, "We can show him to be a sinner. We can show him to be weak. We can diminish him this time." That's the set-up.

Let's go to the second thing: not only do we see the set-up here, notice secondly the miracle. In verse 3, something interesting is stated in the text, "And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and the Pharisees." My first question is: nobody asked a question. The text records no question but Jesus answers them, the text says. It has to mean only one thing: he knows what they're thinking. He knows what's in their heart. So, he answers as if they went ahead and said the question and here we see Jesus has this mercy that all the enemies of earth and hell can't thwart, a mercy he points towards this poor man. He knew their thoughts, he's omniscient. They're trying to tempt Jesus to sin. Someone wrote that the last stage in the wickedness of men's hearts is when they begin to take pleasure in tempting others to sin. Listen to me: you struggle with sin, I struggle with sin, we will all have battles with the old fallen man until we're glorified in heaven but you can avoid purposing to live your life enjoying in helping others dishonor God.

But that's where these guys were. Some of them are called lawyers. That just means they were those who were specially skilled in Old Testament law but in just a moment, Jesus is going to expose them of knowing nothing of the truth of the understanding of God's law. But these egomaniacs doubtlessly worked with tireless energy trying to trick and

trap Jesus. So, Jesus asked them a very simple question in verse 3, he says, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" Here's the man, pitiful man with dropsy standing before the Lord, probably something of a silence in the room and so Jesus answers their heart. Their heart is this, "Is he going to do it?" Because they are convinced, I'm sure they taught their people as such that it would be sin to do the work of healing on the Sabbath so they think they have Jesus. So, he asked them the question but they kept silent, "Is it right or not to heal on the Sabbath?" They wouldn't respond. Their mouths were empty but their hearts were full of evil intent. Jesus, they know very well, has a reputation of having great mercy for those who are suffering and those in misery and they know he would want to heal this man on the Sabbath but now he gives them this question that hushes them to silence.

So, in that silent moment when they were gutless wonders, they're unwilling to state what they believe, afraid they're going to get found out and Jesus, the Bible says in verse 4, "But they kept silent. And He took hold of him," that is the man with dropsy, "and healed him, and sent him away." Jesus has great, great mercy. His mercy cannot be stopped by the envy of his enemies nor thwarted by their threats. Listen to me: when Jesus sets his mercy toward one of his own choosing, all the forces of earth and hell are powerless to stop him. Listen to me: you are one of those miserable ones; you are one of those lost in the misery and the wretchedness of sin and depravity but when Jesus Christ chooses to make you the object of his mercy and favor, nothing can thwart that mercy fulfilling what he sends it out to perform. That's why we believe in the perseverance of the saints. That's why we believe in the eternal security of the believer. Because Christ's mercy cannot be stopped once he aims it toward one of his own. And he's not going to be stopped here. He doesn't care what they think, what they're going to try to prove, disprove or what they're going to say, his mercy was directed toward that man with the dropsy.

Now, let's go to III. where I'll spend most of our time: the message. We've seen the set-up, we've seen the mercy, the miracle and now notice the message. There are some gleanings here that I want to pull out of the text for us today. First of all, I just can't help but notice that the way this man is healed is a beautiful parallel to salvation. I think we find that very often in the Bible that when the Lord heals a man physically, very often you'll see clear spiritual parallels to spiritual healing in that. First of all, this man came to Jesus just like he was. He didn't clean up, dress up, fix up. He didn't say, "Jesus, I'll do 5% of the healing if you'll do 95%." Amen? He came to Jesus, "Here I am." Wicked and all. Sinful and all. Sick. He said, "I'm just coming to you like I am." That's the way you come to Jesus to be saved.

Secondly, he comes fully confident in Christ. He believes Christ will forgive him and will save him. He believes Christ is willing to save him. If you're going to be saved, you must know that Christ has the authority from his Father and the power to cleanse your soul and give you a new heart and make you righteous in the sight of his holy Father. And you must also know and believe that he is willing to do so. You say, "I've sinned so bad. I just feel so dirty. I feel so unworthy. It's worse than you think." But he's willing to do so. Amen? He's willing to save. He's willing to cleanse. He's willing to change you. You have to believe that when you come to him.

Also, you need to come with a Sabbath spirit. This was the Sabbath day; this was a day of rest and this man came resting from all his efforts and from all his works. He has nothing to bring but his infirmities and that's the way we come to Jesus Christ. Finally, putting down the baptism, finally putting down Momma's religion and Daddy's religion and Grand-daddy's religion. Finally just saying, "Christ, if you don't save me as I am, the wretch that I am, I have no hope." You come resting from all other concerns and all other things, putting all of your confidence in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, the Bible says in verse 4, I think this is a beautiful picture, he said to them, "But they kept silent," they wouldn't answer his question. "And He took hold of him," the man with dropsy, "and healed him," and here it is, "and sent him away." He sent him away. I'm convinced that what Jesus was doing here was getting this man out of the company of his enemies and his critics. Now that he's been healed, possibly even gloriously saved from his sins and we don't know his heart here but that's very likely and the one thing that the Pharisees are not going to condone is this man walking around proclaiming Jesus healed me. They're going to be on it so Jesus pulls him apart and says, "You need to be in another fellowship." That's exactly what God does to us. I've often heard people say, "Why does God save us and then leave us down here?" He doesn't just save you and leave you down here, he saves you and joins you to another, to a godly, biblical, Christ-honoring local church fellowship where you can be away from the world's wiles and the world's woes and the world's critics and the world's slanders and the scoffers and the underminers and all that fault-finding. The church is a respite. It's an oasis, if you will, for the soul that belongs to God. We come together for a little touch of heaven, a little touch of eternal fellowship. Yes, far from perfect but God calls us out. That's the word *ekklesia*, church in the New Testament. God's called out ones is what that word means. God calls you from one fellowship into another. It doesn't mean you leave your marriage. Remember the Corinthians thought that once they got saved they needed to divorce their spouses and just devote themselves to God. He said, "No, no, no, you don't leave your marriage, you don't leave your families but you do have a new family you're attached to that loves you, will encourage you and will support you." That's what the church family is for. So, he sent this man away out of that fellowship.

Not only do we see something of a picture of salvation here, notice the second thing here I want you to glean, if you will, and that application is: there is a word about consecrating the Lord's day here. Consecrating the Lord's day. Jesus in no way, shape or fashion said, "The concept of one day a week set apart for rest and for devotion to God has not been thrown out." He could have said that. Now, I do believe that we're not under Sabbath law as a Jewish law, of course, but as born-again children of God, we have a new heart that desires to honor the Lord one day a week, unique compared to the other days of the week. Not unto law and I don't mean to put you under some legal thing but I would like to challenge you, I haven't said much to you on this subject in a few years probably: how are you in your heart at consecrating the Lord's Day? The Lord's Day. "Look, Pastor, you just don't know how busy I am." I'm going to tell you something: some of you are too busy. Now, I'm not saying you can fix it this afternoon but some of you need to intend in

your heart to begin to rethink and reorganize your life so that you can consecrate the Lord's Day. Not in a spirit of legalism, this is your heart I'm talking about.

Two or three thoughts here. Knowing that some of us need to do better about the Lord's Day, let me ask you to do 1. to watch work on the Lord's Day. Is that ox really in a ditch? Do you really have to do that on the Lord's Day? Or is it just a convenient time to do it because you're doing too many other busy things through the week when you could have been doing that? Watch work. Watch entertainment. Do you really need to watch that or be amused by that or be drawn to that or to go to this or go to that? Do those things really help you draw near to the Lord? Watch slackness. How often do you miss small groups? How often do you miss Sunday morning congregational worship? How often do you miss Sunday night congregational worship? Are you too careless about the Lord's Day. Listen to me: we're not under Sabbath law but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has a special day to meet together and rest from the world and we need to consecrate that in our hearts.

I'm not saying it's always fun; I'm not saying that it's always easy. I can promise you that I understand the work schedule of this present world. The world doesn't honor the Lord's Day anymore but are you doing what you can do? Are you praying, "Lord, give me a job where I don't have to work every other Sunday." He may answer that prayer. In your heart, consecrate the Lord's Day. You know, I didn't grow up in a church going home but even as a little boy, I remember that Sunday was different. It just felt different. Nobody said anything to me about it, it just felt different. I'm convinced God has woven into the fabric of creation that one day out of seven is set aside for worship in a special way. As a matter of fact, anthropologists tell us that you can study ancient civilizations who had no concept of the Bible, no concept of the law of Moses, and they almost without exception have one day in seven set aside for worship. Now, they might worship pagan idols but it's just in their DNA.

The Lord is teaching these people on this Sabbath day and the Bible says when he got through healing this man, they wouldn't answer his question about, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath." In verse 6, the Bible says, "And they could make no reply to this." Earlier up in verse 4, the Bible says they would not answer him when he said, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" They just would not answer him, now they cannot answer him. His wisdom, his power and his goodness has left them dumbfounded and perplexed of heart but, unfortunately, though they're dumbfounded and can't speak, they're not changed. Did you hear me? They're impacted but they're not regenerated. They're silenced but they're not spiritually reborn. You do understand there are powerful things that may happen to you even in a church setting that are far from true conversion, even the presence of Christ's life, his teaching, his power, his love, they see him over and over, they've watched miracle after miracle, they've marveled over words he taught but still they're unconverted. It's amazing, isn't it?

Let me give you a third gleaning from the text. A third gleaning would be: we need to be balanced in reaching the lost. In reaching the lost, we need to be balanced. This entire episode of our Lord being confronted by and then confronting these Pharisees at this, if you will, Sunday dinner meeting, was because these Pharisees were the unrelenting

enemies of Jesus Christ and over and over and over again, Jesus calls their bluff, if you will, he rebukes them publicly so that 1. he might refute their error. Secondly, he's reaffirming his credibility that he is who he says he is. Thirdly, he's using these confrontations to instruct his true believers. So, that's what I'm doing here, trying to bring out some gleanings, some instruction that we can get from this confrontation at this Sunday dinner meeting.

Now, let's learn something from the way Jesus approached these lost Pharisees. First of all, he had mercy on them. There was a goodness. They deserved not any more of his time. He had no obligation to honor them with his presence at their Sunday dinner. I mean, especially after what he's been through with them so many times already. But he has a compassion, he has a mercy. But he also has confrontation. Notice the balance: mercy, compassion and patience but clear confrontation with the truth.

I think the modern church growth movement misses it here woefully. The modern evangelical church is way out of balance here. Here's what they usually say to us, they say, "We've got to change things so that we can reach people where they are. We've got to relate to them where they are." They go into all these things and you know, I beat this drum a lot but I'm going to keep beating it because you need to hear it because it is so prominent and ever unceasing and sounds logical and wise. So, we've got to go meet them where they are because Jesus went to the home of the Pharisees and others and tried to reach them where they are so they say we've got to bring lots of drama into the church and we've got to dramatize things because people like that, they're drawn to that. All kinds of entertainment things into the church. It's very common to have secular music, wide open secular music in the church service. All kinds of unimaginable multi-media events. I mean, I read about one church that brought in Hollywood engineers to create their great presentation sensation, if you will: lights and smoke and video, just incredible stuff.

Now, not all of that is necessarily evil, what does trouble me deeply is they are very slack on preaching doctrine. They are very slack on the doctrine of sin. They are very slack on the doctrine of human depravity. They are very slack on the infinite holiness of God. They are very slack on the doctrine of the judgment. They are very slack on the doctrine of wrath and other important doctrines which Jesus was not slack on. He may have gone and reached them where they were but he clearly called out their sin and rebuked them. Both were going on. Listen to this statement: "We must not stop being what we are in order to reach lost people where they are." It's as if we have to become worldly to reach them. That is always wrong. You don't sin in order to achieve a means that totally means that is winning the lost. We never stop being who we are, the saved, reborn, consecrated, committed children of God in order to try to reach folks where they are. Jesus didn't do it that way.

Furthermore, when we reach out to them where they are, one of the first things we have to do is tell them where they are. Did you hear me? We've got to tell them where they are and where they are is not a good place. They are under the wrath of God. They are, by nature, the children of wrath. They are unbelievers already under the judgment of God.

They are like those Jesus rebuked in chapter 13. As a matter of fact, verses 3, 5, 24, 27 and 35 of the previous chapter we just studied through show Jesus publicly rebuking and calling out the sins of those he was talking to. By the way, he's not just talking to the hypocrite religious authorities, he's talking to the common folks. So, as he reached out to them with compassion where they are, he was clear to confront them to show them where they truly are, in a very, very bad place.

Then, of course, as always not only do we try to reach them where they are and make sure we tell them where they are in God's sight, we tell them the way home is through Christ and through Christ alone. Now, these modern, sophisticated, learned men who are giving us all these "new approaches to reach this new generation" as if this new generation is a special unique brand of sinner, they're so special and unique that we have to modify the truth of God to reach them. Listen to me, friend: if God's not going to win them with the truth, he's certainly not going to save them with a lie. We stay with the truth until God works. Amen? And if we don't see enough fruit, then we get on our faces and pray and beg and plead and repent and humble ourselves until the Spirit of God does work and save men.

But they'll argue with us, "Well, if you don't change, it's not going to work." Well, have you ever considered that Jesus' approach didn't work? Have you ever thought about it? By the time he gets to the cross, almost nobody is following him. That is, if you measure success by the way many modern churches measure success, Jesus' approach didn't work. The great majority of the Jews and practically all of the religious leaders of the Jews did not follow him. It didn't work. But Jesus wasn't concerned with what was working, he was concerned with what was right, what was true. The question about church was not, "Is it fun?" the question you should ask about church was not, "Was it exciting?" the question about church should not be, "Were you blessed?" The question about church should be when you leave, "Was it true?" And I will because I'm born-again of God, train my heart to joy in the truth and if my pastor, my small group leader, the elders of my church are preaching and teaching the truth and I'm not rejoicing in it, then I must repent and get my heart right until I am joying in the truth. Jesus said, "The truth shall set you free," and those born of the Spirit want the truth. The Spirit, which is the Spirit of truth, is the author of truth which is the Scriptures and those within whom he dwells want to hear those Scriptures and heed those truths. So, let's be balanced in our witnessing, in our preaching, in our sharing. Yes, we must always be humble and have compassion and patience with sinners but we must also faithfully tell them the truth about sin, depravity, our offensiveness to a holy God, the just wrath that's on all men who have not yet believed. That's a balanced approach.

Lastly, then I'll be done, number four as far as gleaning messages from the text: we must trust the Spirit. This dovetails very closely and we must trust the Spirit. That means in our ministries and in our outreach and in our efforts to win the lost. You know, here we have in this setting at this Sunday dinner table, if you will, Jesus once again has a confrontation with the Pharisees and these Pharisees, after yet another confrontation, are unchanged and they're going to leave this dinner more vigilant than ever to destroy Jesus Christ and in the end, this is where all men arrive, you will either serve him and love him



and trust him or you will end up actively working to destroy him. You'll end up in one of the two places. I mean, think about it just for a moment, think about all that these Pharisees had before them. There is no way they could have seen everything that Jesus did without honestly with their eyes being impressed with what they saw. Would you agree with that? I mean, seeing the miracles they'd been seeing, they had to say, "That's impressive." As a matter of fact, that's why they hated him because it was impressive. He was getting their popularity.

Secondly, they couldn't help but be impressed with what they heard him say. His teaching was amazing. They may have hated him for it but they had to be impressed. They had to be impressed with what their hearts or their minds thought about Jesus. If they saw his miracles and heard his teaching and saw the demonstrations of love and grace, they in their hearts and minds had to say, "That's amazing." They had to be impressed, so deeply impressed with what their eyes saw and deeply impressed with what their ears heard and deeply impressed with what their minds thought, yet they were unchanged. They were not converted. Zechariah 4:6 says, "It's not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord." You can have the mightiest demonstration to impress the five sense of men but God does not save men, boys and girls or women through impressing the five senses, God saves through the sixth sense, the Spirit of God working in the spirit of men.

Think about it: if doing the things that would impress men's physical senses, if that's the key to converting men, then why were these Pharisees and Jews yet unconverted? Look, you can put on a million dramas of Jesus and you can't match what it's like having Jesus there. Amen? He was there. You can hear a million preachers preach or singers sing or the most fantastic multi-media demonstration of the Bible in the world but you can't get anywhere close to being as effective as hearing Jesus preach and teach. He was there. So, if that's what does it, if impressing and being creative and being convincing and being clever and being culturally relevant and meeting people, if all of that is what saves men's souls, these guys would have been 98% saved and on their way to heaven. Would you not agree? I mean, why do you need drama when you've got the real thing? Being of this church heads of the households, are you leading your families that is not by might and is not by power but it's by the Spirit says the Lord of hosts.

Real quick: I don't know what's wrong with you this morning. I want to get some more Amens out of this. I'm not talking about my preaching, I'm talking about the truth of the word of God. Where are your Amens this morning? I'm going to have to come to every one of your houses on Sunday morning, we're putting up the Cheerios and the Wheaties and we're fasting until you get a little more Amen in you when the word of God is preached. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. Strap on this, I'm about to unstrap this into your souls, "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age." Stop right there. The wisdom of our message and our ministry is not of this age. In other words, it's not a wisdom that impresses the human eye, it's not a wisdom that impresses the human ear, it's not a wisdom that impresses the human heart. We don't win them through those gates. We don't win them through the eye gate, the ear gate or the heart gate. Amen? Our wisdom is not of this age. "Nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God

predestined before the ages to our glory.” Now, what he means is that in the Old Testament era, this truth was there but it was veiled, it was cloaked and that is that God is going to transform men and build for himself a people through a means beyond the human realm, through an agency beyond men's abilities, communication skills, dynamic, charisma, personality, creativity, demonstrations, promotions. It's above and beyond all of that. It was a mystery. Men naturally think in those terms. Amen? They naturally think in terms of let's put it on and we'll wow them a little, get them saved.

Did I tell you about chicken theology? Have you hear the story of chicken theology? True story. I was church in Tennessee and a man owned a bunch of chicken factories. He didn't make chickens, he killed chickens. A true story. He pulled the pastor aside one Sunday, a pastor I was preaching for, and he said, “I know how to do this. I know how to do this. We have found in the chicken factory that when those chickens come in and I mean, doggone, they've been in the back of trucks like this and they're just frazzled and they're nervous and upset. We've found that if we bring them in and we put blue lights and green lights on them, they just relax and they just go right along and we chop their heads right off.” He said, “Pastor, when it gets time for the invitation, if we can put on some green lights and some blue lights I believe we can get them saved.” Serious. I can take you to one of the most respected churches in Birmingham, Alabama, a brother who preaches there, I like him, I think he's a good guy, he's esteemed, he uses blue and green lights to help the people relax. Look: we have something better than lights, colored lights or smoke, the Spirit of God. That's what we have. It's not of this age, it's not of this age, it's not of this age. Aren't you glad about that because then God can take a backwards hillbilly from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee who doesn't know anything and use him to build the kingdom of God because it's not about cleverness and creativity and coolness and relevance, it's about God and the Spirit of God.

Let me tell you something about your precious children, you're raising your children and they are more precious to you than anything on earth until those precious souls are in heaven: get them out of goofy, shallow, fadish, passing fad youth program and get them under the word of God. All that stuff will do is dilute them and mislead them. Now look, you know I like to have fun. We have some fun at our stuff, I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about being balanced but in our hearts, our hope has to be the gospel and the mysterious work of the Spirit which is outside of our control. Are you with me, church? Trust the Spirit.

I haven't gotten through 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 yet. Put it back up there, brother. Verse 9, “But,” the conjunction but begins verse 9, “but just as it is written, 'The things which eye has not seen,'” it doesn't come through the eye gate, “and which ear has not heard,” it doesn't come through the ear gate, “and has not even entered the natural heart or mind of man,” it doesn't come through what logically, intellectually makes sense to a man who is fallen and unregenerate, “all that God has prepared for those who love him.” Verse 10, “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit,” there it is. “For the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.”

I love the word of God. I love that you love the word of God. Do you know in how many churches this would get me fired? It would. I'm not exaggerating to you when there was a season of time when I preached in a series of churches who fired their pastors within a couple of months of me leaving and that's not being funny, I don't rejoice in that. Because they felt like their pastor was going to follow what I was preaching and it terrified them. They're just exactly like the Pharisees, it was getting out of their control. It was getting in God's control and they were terrified of it. Look, if Jesus and the Spirit of God showed up in the typical Southern Baptist Church it would scare them all literally to death. I'm not talking about signs, wonders and miracles, I'm talking about that he strips the flesh, cuts the Achille's heel of pride and leaves us desperately dependent on a sovereign God and the work of the Spirit under the preaching of the gospel.

By the time our Lord was crucified, Jesus only had a handful of faithful followers but what happened to these tens and tens and tens of thousands who thronged around him and praised him and honored him and acted so devoted to him? They weren't there. But then Pentecost occurred and tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands appear to be genuinely converted. What was the difference? Who came at Pentecost? The Spirit of God. All the signs, wonders, miracles, teachings, everything Jesus did and I'm not claiming in a theological content, the Spirit had no ministry before Pentecost but what I am saying is: until God poured it out to convert the souls, they didn't get it. Even with Jesus himself present. So, don't give me this foolish worldly nonsense that if we can put on a big enough show we can get a lot of people saved. That is hogwash and slop. What you'll get is a lot of people converted to your creativity and they'll stay as long as you're creative but when the church down the road gets a little more exciting, they're gone because you converted them to excitement, not to Jesus. Listen to me: we're supposed to be converted to a Christ that we're willing to carry a cross for. We're supposed to be committed to a Christ that we're willing to suffer for if need be. We're willing to give up a business, lose a job, whatever it is for this Christ. Do you mean to tell me we've got to coach them in with nursery school and children's church level creativity? That's not going to last when they get in the world and the real trial comes. We've got these pastors dressing up like goof-ball stuff "to be relevant and reach the people." One pastor had a Jesus impersonator on Easter to keep the people entertained and coming. Can't you see an old brother out there about to lose his job because he doesn't want to compromise his convictions thinking, "I can't wait to get to church. Maybe we'll have Jesus this week. That'll help me. I'm losing my job!" Jesus can't help you if you're losing your job, only the Spirit of God in your heart can help you if you're losing your job.

These things are not by might, not by power, but by the Spirit says the Lord. These Pharisees are unchanged because the Spirit of God had not revealed Christ to them. We must be careful as believers and careful in the church to preach only that which God has promised to empower in order to change men's hearts, "For the gospel," Romans 1:16, "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek." If you're with me on these things, would you say Amen.

Let's stand together.