

I. Introduction

- A. I have been in full-time pastoral ministry since 1979 (let's just say I started when I was 2), and the last two weekends at Neighborhood Church were the sweetest moves of God I've ever seen.
- B. If you weren't here, we love you, but you missed something really cool. For the last two weekends, we offered spontaneous baptisms. We read in the Bible how God's people took important steps to get caught up with God. They had unfinished business. They hadn't closed some chapters from their past. And we asked you if you were willing to close the books on a few items of unfinished business with God: either get saved if you weren't already saved, and then get baptized in water if you were saved but not yet baptized.
- C. And so many of you said, yes. We were blown away.
- D. In the last two weekends, there were 304 brave, nervous, happy, spontaneous people who were baptized at Neighborhood Church. Would you please stand up and stay standing?
- E. Also, over the last two weekends, over 45 people prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior. You crossed the line and God saved you and adopted you. Would you please stand up too?
- F. It is an awesome thing to take steps with God. It is an awesome thing to move forward with God. And that's my prayer for me and you, all of the time. That we would keep taking steps forward with God.
- G. And guess what? We have another spontaneous surprise today. I know, some of my Facebook friends are telling me they can't handle the surprises. All I can say is this: when you're trying to take the Promised Land you've got to expect surprises.
- H. And we have another one today. I'm going ask you to take a step of faith today. I know that you might feel scared, or your heart will be pounding, or you didn't bargain on this, but when God tugs at your heart, what are you going to tell Him?

II. Joshua

- A. That's what's happening here in the book of Joshua. Nothing predictable happens. Everything is counter-intuitive, weird, and seemingly irresponsible.
- B. But the Jews are taking hold of their God-given birthright. They are finally living up to their status as royal sons and daughters of God.
- C. So we've been tracking their story in the Bible because the times have changed, but the truths have not changed.

III. *And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" (Joshua 5:13, NKJV).*

- A. Joshua is the commander. He will lead God's people into the Promised Land. They will take the Promised Land little by little (Ex 23:30, Deut 7:22). One city at a time, one tribe at a time.
- B. The first city in the crosshairs is called Jericho.
- C. Joshua goes out to survey Jericho, and understand how the fight will go down. At least that's what he thought he was doing. What actually happened was that God had something different planned.
- D. And I want to pause right here, and remind you of an important truth from the Bible. Here's what God says:
 - 1. *8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9, NKJV).*
- E. Listen carefully: until you accept this truth, your life will be hard. Period.
- F. Let me ask a question. In your opinion is the world a better place when God does stuff His way or your way? Seriously, aren't there times you think the universe would be better if you were in charge? Admit it! You know what? They make medication for that.
- G. If your brain were so big that you could understand God's ways, God would have to be so small that He couldn't be God. God rules and God rules His own way.
 - 1. He told Abraham to sacrifice his son.
 - 2. He told Moses to head walk through the sea.
 - 3. He told Joshua to circumcise his fighting force in hostile territory.
 - 4. God told Gideon to cut his fighting force from 30,000 down to 300.
 - 5. He's going to tell Joshua not to fight Jericho, but to march around the walls of Jericho armed only with trumpets.
- H. His ways are not our ways. If we were consulting God, we would argue with Him on every item. His thoughts are high above our thoughts.
- I. When it came to salvation...
 - 1. God Himself entered the human race, in the unique person of our Lord, Jesus Christ. You're kidding, God, right?
 - 2. Jesus lived as a man. He let go of His comforts; He didn't use His own divine powers. He willingly handcuffed Himself so that He might be made like us in every way. As your advisor, I can't recommend that, Lord.
 - 3. Jesus was arrested, tortured, tried, and crucified. God, how can death win anything?
- J. But in all those things that seem like defeats, God was only setting up a victory.
- K. I will tell you today that in every area of your life, right here, right now, where you feel like there is a defeat, God is only setting up a victory.
- L. And if you fight Him, if you resist Him, if you reject Him, you are fighting your victory, your blessing, your joy, your peace.
- M. How many times have you resented God because of how He led you, and then afterwards you realized that God had something better planned than you ever imagined.
- N. That's why I say until we get it into our thick skulls that God's ways are higher and better than our ways, our lives will be hard, because we'll always be resenting THE GOD WHO IS SETTING UP YOUR VICTORY.
- O. And God is setting up your victory.
- P. But only if...

- Q. We're getting to the something, and then I'm going to ask you to do something. Last week you cheered when 304 people did their "something".
- R. **WHAT IF TODAY IS YOUR TURN?**
- S. Question: if God told you to do something today that didn't fit your plan, would you do it? Three hundred four people said yes, these last two weekends. Today I have my sights set on all the rest of you.
- T. And so Joshua checks out Jericho, and he sees a Man, with a sword drawn.
- IV. *So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." (Joshua 5:14a, NKJV).*
- A. This is incredible.
- B. Joshua asks, are you for us or for our enemies. The man answers, NO.
- C. Think about that. You know, in the 17th century, Galileo said that the earth isn't the center of the solar system, the sun is. Prior to that, everybody believed in geo-centrism. The earth is the center of the solar system. But the guys like Copernicus did the math and the observations, and they discovered helio-centrism. And Galileo agreed, and taught helio-centrism.
- D. And the crazy, messed up church convened the Inquisition to nail Galileo.
- E. Now, I'm going to tell you a similar principle today, and I hope you don't walk out of here and convene an Inquisition.
- F. Attention, you, who can hear my voice today.
- G. Guess what. The universe does not revolve around you.
- H. We so easily interpret life from our own self-centered perspective.
1. Is this good for me, is this bad for me?
 2. Do I like this, do I not like this?
 3. Does this make me feel good? Does this make me feel bad?
- I. Or, like Joshua,
1. Or you for me? Are you against me?
- J. And the answer comes back, NO. And Joshua realizes he's talking to the Lord.
- K. Imagine this. Imagine popping some popcorn, and sitting down in a theater with your friends and family. Now imagine that you're going to rewind your life for the last week, and play it on a screen at the store, in the classroom, on the job, with your spouse, in traffic, or waiting in line at the DMV.
- L. Question: are the odds high or low that we would watch you demonstrating, not a geocentric, and not a heliocentric, but an EGO-CENTRIC view of the universe? Ego-centric. Are the odds high or low?
- M. God, are you for me, or against me?
- N. And God says, NO. Are you for Me, or against Me?
- O. You can take heliocentric, geocentric, and egocentric and throw it all in the dumpster. The only way to live is THEOCENTRIC, so that your life revolves around God.
- P. And that is exactly what hit Joshua squarely between the eyes. I'm hoping, and I'm praying, and our team has been working and planning so that it would hit you between the eyes too.
- Q. And look what happened.
- V. *And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" 15 Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:14-15, NKJV).*
- A. A lot of you have kids young enough to appreciate this.
- B. A lot of stores have shopping carts with built-in little plastic cars for the kids to sit in. My kids are too big, but it wasn't long ago that I'd be pushing them around the Lowes, and they'd be inside the cart, turning their little steering wheels.
- C. And for fun, I would push the cart in the direction they steered. They loved it. They had a sense they were in control.
- D. But were they?
- E. No, their little steering wheels only gave them an ILLUSION of being in control.
- F. It's like going on a roller coaster and believing you can steer it by leaning left and right.
- G. No. All you can do is hang on tight, and have an attitude: I am going to enjoy this ride.
- H. All you can do is give up the illusion of being in control, and do what Joshua did: And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, What does my Lord say to His servant?"
- I. God, you are Master and Commander of the Universe. God you are Savior of all. God you are working your plan. You have objectives that are so wonderful and glorious; my little mind can't grasp them. God your ways are bigger and better than my ways. And the universe doesn't revolve around me, it revolves around You.
- J. Lord, You rule. Lord, You reign. And you get on your face, and you surrender the illusion of control, and you say, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" and hop on the roller coaster, buckle in and quit resenting the dips and twists and turns. Enjoy the ride.
- K. Let's talk about unfinished business with God. I'm going to give you an opportunity to do something every bit as cool as the people who just got baptized. Today, I want to baptize something else.
- VI. Unfinished Business
- A. Here's a simple way to look at your life.
- B. Picture your life as a circle, that's sliced into sectors.
1. Sexuality
 2. Spirituality
 3. Relationships (marriage, dating, friendships, family)
 4. Physical (health, rest, exercise, diet)
 5. Career (education, homemaking, life-mission)

- 6. Financial Life
- 7. Values and Beliefs

- C. I'm sure you could add some sectors.
- D. So, let me ask you a question: how many of these sectors does the Bible address? How many of these sectors does Jesus want to speak into through His Word and His Spirit?
- E. In how many of these sectors should God be at the center?
- F. All of them. Do you agree?
- G. Really, do you agree?
- H. Because God really convicted me last week. We sat here, and applauded 304 brave people who took a very uncomfortable plunge into the waters of baptism last week. That was awesome. This would be sector #2: Spirituality. Three hundred four people took care of unfinished business last week, in sector 2 of their lives. That was awesome.
- I. But that still left almost 1,600 spectators who sat and watched 304 participants. And that doesn't include countless friends who join our services on the Internet. I want you to know, I'm talking to you too today.
- J. So here's how God spoke to me this week, and I didn't like it. God put a burden on me, and my job today is to shift that burden to you. You might not like it, and you might even resent it. I totally know that's the risk right now.
- K. But if you could get me, the messenger, out of your mind and deal with God, and let go of your tiny plastic steering wheel, just like I had to, we'll focus on:

VII. Sector 6

- A. This week, God spoke to me about sector 6. Our church has been blessed by God. We are growing, and God is doing amazing things.
- B. But we are growing faster than our giving.
- C. We just closed the books on 2009 (our fiscal year ends in October). And we really did something amazing, something that few other churches are seeing in today's economy.
- D. Our giving in 2009 (all together) was \$642,000 MORE THAN LAST YEAR!!!!
- E. This is hugely positive, and a wonderful thing to celebrate. And we are so thankful.
- F. But there's one problem, and this has been squeezing me and our staff for a long time. On Sunday night, after last service, I was so depressed over this.
- G. Until, I believe God told me, "Bill, last week you baptized bodies, and this week, I want you to baptize wallets."
 - 1. Get ready.
- H. And I resisted. Because I know how people think the church is all about money. We're on this spiritual high. God is on the move and now, you're going to spoil that good feeling by getting into people's money. God, I don't want to do it.
- I. And God said, "Bill, this is not about you. It's about Me."
- J. Because the fact is, dear church, when we take an offering, you are not exactly giving to the church; you are giving to the Lord of the church. It's about Him.
- K. And if we were to take everybody's offering money, and pile it on the stage, and light it on fire, it would still be an offering to God. Isn't that what they did in Old Testament days?
- L. Our building fund is dedicated to creating a tool to preach Jesus Christ in this place for generations to come.
- M. But our general fund—that's what's hurting right now and I want to boil this down:
 - 1. If 1/5 of our church gave up two Lattes at Starbucks each week and had given their offerings to the Lord, we would not have a deficit.
 - 2. Another way to look at it is this: we ran hard for 52 weeks last year, but only received enough offerings for 49.5 weeks. We're close, but not close enough. And that gap hurts us.
- N. We ran in the red \$168,000 last year (about \$1.70 per person).
- O. But we really need double that amount that to do a good job.
- P. This is how we fund youth groups, kid's ministries, Awana clubs, Celebrate Recovery, Stephen's Ministries, and Bible classes. This is how we have Easter services, with 4,000 people, at the Convention Center, and all these things we're scrambling through just to stay caught up with the awesome things God is doing.
- Q. It's going to give me an ulcer, and God told me, "Bill, that's not your ulcer. Pass it on."
- R. So, here's my question, as respectfully, and lovingly as I can ask it: Do you have unfinished business with God in the financial sector of your life?
- S. And here's the follow up question, and I KNOW you're going to be upset with this one:
 - 1. *"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" (Haggai 1:4, NIV).*
- T. Here's the translation:
 - 1. Do you have cable TV, cell phones, manicures, travel trailers, motorcycles, RVs, Netflix, and lattes, and then turn to God, and tell Him, I don't have enough left over for You?
- U. You might be saved. You might be baptized. But you still have unfinished business with God AND YOUR LIFE SUFFERS BECAUSE OF IT.
- V. God says,
 - 1. *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you! (Malachi 3:10, NLT).*
- W. God is setting up your victory, BUT YOU HAVE TO TRUST HIM FOR IT. YOU HAVE TO TRUST HIM. YOU HAVE TO LIVE LIKE YOU TRUST HIM.

X. Do you trust God in your financial sector?

VIII. Time for baptisms

- A. Are you ready to get caught up? Are you ready to let God speak into your financial life? Are you ready to fall on your face before your Lord and say, "What does my Lord have to say to me?"
- B. It's time to figuratively baptize your wallet.
- C. Our band is coming back up to complete our worship set.
- D. Our prayer team will come up, and our elders will come up. Because we didn't want this just to be about money, but about **EVERY SECTOR OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH GOD.**
- E. So here's the deal. I want you to come up here for three reasons
 - 1. So you can pray for somebody else. We have cards here with hundreds of prayer requests that we get every single week. Come up, take a card, pray, put it back.
 - 2. So you can receive prayer for yourself. Our prayer team will pray for you, for your health, your finances, your job, career, and marriage—whatever. Our elders will be here to anoint you with oil, and to pray for your healing, physical, spiritual, or emotional. Or you can just write down your prayer need, and put it in the box.
 - 3. So you can make up your ungiven offerings to God. Let go of your tiny plastic steering wheel, and **LET JESUS BLESS YOUR FINANCES:** even if it seems uncomfortable, even if you can't afford it. Even if you're ticked off that I'm asking for it. It's not about you. It's about Jesus.
- F. But you say, I didn't bring my check book. That's okay. We are all set up for you to give right now by credit card. And I don't want you to go into debt. Only do this if you pay your card off each month. But get caught up. Baptize your wallet, and the angels will cheer you on every bit as much as they cheered on our friends who baptized their bodies and spirits last week.
- G. One last thing, I have a little basket here, and it's precious to me. This basket was a gift to me and all of us. I went to Africa. We drove miles into a jungle on dirt roads, and visited a church. At that church, the youth group presented Neighborhood Church with this hand woven basket.
- H. It represents about 40 hours of someone's life. A gift to you from brothers and sisters in the Lord, who sleep on dirt floors in mud huts with no electricity.
- I. So, I thought it would be cool to put your checks or your cash or your credit card slip into this basket, as a symbol that you too are giving yourself and your substance to the Lord.
- J. The Africans were happy to give.
- K. And we're going to be happy to give today because the Lord loves a cheerful giver.
- L. I'm going to pray, and then I want you to come.
- M. A special note to our friends who join us on the Internet. We spend thousands of dollars each year to bless you on the internet. Would you be willing to support the ministry that feeds your soul?
- N. Please visit <http://www.ncredding.com> and click the "Online Giving" button, and join with us in this great work of God!