
IMPACTING YOUR WORLD

MARK 6:30-44

Good morning to you, and thank you so much, Brian. It is a privilege and a delight to be with you this morning. I really want to say the feeling is so mutual. Since I have met your pastor, the few moments that we could spend together at various intervals during the last year and a half have been refreshing and exciting. Here is how I feel about Brian Brookins: He is a statesman in the kingdom. That's the sense that he carries, and you are privileged to have leadership that loves Jesus and is true to the fundamentals of the faith and the church and the kingdom. Why don't you just give your leaders a hand this morning? Bless you.

I really appreciate the fact that I can share the word with you this morning. As you heard, I hail from South Africa, but I have been privileged the last year and a half to be engaged with Calvary Chapel in the beautiful journey that we have seen that church take after crisis. Subsequently, I have been brought into this new and fresh and God-breathed process of church leaders coming together across the tri-county, taking hands to trust God for greater impact within our world.

This morning I want to talk to you about impacting your world, and really speak to you as an individual about your own role and calling that God has upon your life to make a contribution to affect the world. In Africa we have a saying -- we probably got it from you -- but we have a saying that "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, you've heard that before, right? What this means for us is that your context, your world, the reference that you find yourself in geographically has a distinct influence on how you view your world. It affects your worldview, your beliefs, your values, and your behavior very deeply.

It's interesting for me as I travel the world to see how different regions of the world place value on different things. Here in the U.S., just to give you an idea, you guys play your football with helmets on, and you ride your motorcycles without them. Somehow you think that's all right.

Your village, your context influences how you perceive reality. And if it's true that it takes a village to raise a child, the question bodes: Who raises the village? Who determines what our village will look like? Who determines the values of our village? Who determines what our village will believe?

The challenge for us as Christ-followers is to come to the understanding that we have not just an opportunity, but we have an obligation to engage our village, to engage our world so that we can affect the village -- the education, the arts, the media, the government, the business, the context of

our village. Because if we do not have a voice within those spaces, if we do not engage those particular environments, we cannot complain when some godless, secular humanist defines the village. We have a role to play as God's people. God has put us in this world to engage this world.

I want to share with you about what that means from the basis of my own journey. In 1994, in South Africa, I was pastoring a church within a particular context. Many of you who might know the history of South Africa will know that in 1994 radical change took place in our country, where it entered a new democratic dispensation. At that stage I was pastoring a white suburban church. Suddenly our world changed, and God spoke to us in leadership that we should embrace this change and lead the church to not only accept the change, but also serve this new dispensation in a new and different way.

Well, I had no idea where to start, so we prayed and asked God for wisdom, understanding, and strategy; and it is within that context that God started speaking to us. One of the areas where God really spoke to us that was helpful for us to understand it more clearly was the story in Mark Chapter 6 where Jesus feeds the 5000. It's a beautiful story of Jesus feeding hungry people, but in that portion of scripture God gave us five key references to clearly understand the strategic intent of how we could better embrace our reality.

This morning we do not have time to address all five of those issues. I am just going to address one, but all that means, Brian, is that you will have to invite me back four more times. But this is the important one, because if you get this, you somehow understand how God is taking us on a journey.

It's amazing. If you consider that story, you see the clear difference between the disciples and Jesus. For us, the first step was that we had to change our mentality. You see, the disciples had concern. They were the ones that saw the problem. They were aware of the challenge. But immediately, when they saw this challenge of feeding 5000 people, they were confronted with the sense of their own lack of resource, their own incapacity to make a difference. Immediately, it somehow neutralized them, feeling, "What difference can we make?" It is with that thought and that mentality that they go to Jesus, and the way they want to address this problem is: Let's send it away.

Somehow, we found ourselves as a church, I found myself as a leader, identifying with the disciples. I was very concerned. I had concerns about so many things. We as a church were concerned, but we didn't feel we could make a difference. We were trying to send the problem away, hoping that somewhere someone else would take care of it. But when they get to Jesus, the bible says Jesus

had compassion. When they engaged Jesus, Jesus said, “We are going to give them something to eat.”

That must have been very challenging. That must have rocked their world, because they had never seen anything like this happen before. And we recognize that somehow Jesus was approaching this with the same reality, but with a different mentality. Jesus wanted to engage the challenge in the knowledge that while we engage, God will be with us.

So we ask this question: What would it mean for us to move from concern to compassion? How can we cover this distance between being a concerned group of people to becoming a people engaged, trusting God, making a contribution, and trusting that somehow we will be able to feed, somehow be able to engage our reality? We realized that there were a few levels where we had to make that transition. We simply coined them as moving from concerned to compassion in our theology, our philosophy, and our strategy.

We started out with our theology, because (and I know this is not true for the purists that I’m speaking to today) I had to make up some distance in my theology. Somehow in my mind I did not have enough theological bandwidth to think that Jesus Christ is concerned about what goes on in the world. My theology was very church-centered. It was about bringing people to salvation, discipling them to follow Jesus, and trusting that they would hold on so that one day they would go to heaven. But really, I was not concerned too much about the world. I was not concerned about education and the media and the arts. You know, that’s just a broken, damaged context out there, and that’s not my responsibility. I need to get people out of the world. As a matter of fact, one of my favorite scriptures in the bible was, “I am not of this world.”

Then one day I made a discovery that that text is within a particular context. The context of that particular text is John Chapter 17, where Jesus is praying the high priestly prayer. This was just before he was going to die. This was just before he was going to leave this world. Listen to what Jesus prays: “I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” That was my favorite part. But listen to what he then prays: “Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” Not of the world, but in the world. I struggled with these particular verses until one day I got a revelation. I got this revelation when I was trying to set my dog free from fleas. So I share with you with liberty this morning, the parable of the fleas.

My dog had fleas, and I decided I was going to start at the tail end. I was going to comb through

the hair of the dog, and every flea that I could find I was going to set my dog free from. I don't know if you have ever tried it, but it's a very challenging exercise. While I was busy doing that, a friend of mind arrived. He asked me what I was doing. I explained to him my project. He said, "Alan, why don't you just go to the store and buy a flea collar?" I thought, well, there's an idea I never thought of. I bought the flea collar, brought it to the dog, and put it around the neck of the dog. Within three days, all the fleas were gone. I'm intrigued. I'm trying to figure out how this system works. How do the fleas at the tail end know there is now a flea collar around the neck of the dog? How do they know it is a flea collar? I mean, I had the instructions with me, but somehow they knew it was time to leave.

So I went back to my friend. I said, "You better explain to me how this works." He said, "Alan, it's actually pretty simple." He said, "On this collar there is a powder. When the dog moves, the hair brushes against the collar and the powder is released. It sits on the skin of the dog. It is then assimilated through the skin into the blood stream and it builds up immunity in the dog. Now, as the blood circulates through the dog, when the flea at the tail end bites the dog, the flea dies and the dog lives." And I said, "Hallelujah! I now understand John 17!" Because this is what Jesus was praying, right?

Listen to what he was praying: "Father, I do not pray that you take them out of the flea nest of this world. Put them right in between the fleas." That's a new translation. Listen: "Do something to them. Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. Let truth so find opportunity in their lives, let truth become such reality in their lives that that truth will build an immune system within them, so that when they engage this world, they will not be affected by the world, but they will affect their world."

Wow. This is our calling as people of God! That's the reason why we sit under the word Sunday after Sunday. That's the reason why we bring our bibles and discuss it in smaller groups. That's the reason why we are engaging truth. Why? Not just so that we can qualify to go to heaven. We are engaging truth because truth empowers us to be able to live in this world, not to be affected or infatuated by the world, but to represent another kingdom. That's powerful.

You see, that's the premise of our engagement in the world. It's not just some social action. It's not just taking responsibility so that we can go beat up people with a few scriptures. It's living from a conviction. Oh, what is this truth? It's our identification with The Truth – Jesus Christ. "I am the truth," he said. What does it mean to be identified with Jesus? It means that we are identified in the greatest moment ever recorded in history.

You know, it's amazing -- as I engage here in South Florida I see that you guys are quite a sporting environment. I was with the Panthers the other day and everybody around me was just praying a fight would break out. What kind of sport is this? Then I went to the Miami Heat and watched them play, and here is the amazing thing that I saw. When the team wins, something happens to the fans. It's quite amazing, isn't it? Something happens to the fans. Suddenly they get an attitude. They don't walk, they move. And if you ask them who won, they say, "We won." What do you mean, "We won? You did nothing, man." They say, "Hey, no -- when they win, I win." That's the power of identification. That's the power of association.

In our context we call that faith, because that recorded victory now suddenly has a bearing on their lives. It changes the way they think, they feel, they speak, and the way they engage. Listen, there is a recorded victory 2000 years ago that includes our lives, and Jesus Christ won! And because he won, you win! You win! You are included in a reference, and that reference has a bearing on your life.

You see, the bible says that when Jesus Christ died, you died. We died with him. What did we die for? The power of sin was broken over our lives. The inferior reference of Adam was effectively dealt with. He is no longer defining my identity. My identity is no longer in Adam. My identity is in Christ. He defines who I am, because the bible says not only did I die with him, I was raised with him. I was raised with him into newness of life. I am a new creation. I have the favor and the smile of God over my life. We read that this morning: "God is for me." Paul shouts this out! If God is for me (that's not a question, it's a statement) then who can be against me? The favor of God upon my life.

But not only was I raised with Christ, the bible also says I share in his triumph. I am seated with Christ in heavenly places. I have been repositioned. I have a new authority. I now have proximity with God. The distance has been canceled. I now live a new life. When this truth takes hold of your life -- that you know who you are in Christ -- it repositions you for life.

But then he challenges us to engage the world. You know, many times we, as Christ followers, are very much like the people of Jerusalem. Oh, they loved Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was the city of God. It was the city of peace. Jeru-shalom. Shalom for a Jew was more than just the absence of war, it was not just the absence of the negative. This term "shalom" really implied everything that was positive. The dictionary would explain it as follows: shalom (this concept) is completeness, wholeness, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, and harmony. These were the concepts that were given to this thought of shalom: wholeness, restoration, and completeness.

It is beautiful to see in the bible where the term “shalom” is used. When it says Joshua took the people of God through the Jordan River and they built an altar with “unhewn stones,” the word there for “unhewn” or “unbroken” is “shalom” -- with “shalom” rocks. When Nehemiah builds the wall and the bible says he completed the wall in 52 days that word “completed” is the word “shalom.” He made whole. He restored. So in the mind of the Jews, they had this sense of Jerusalem, the city of God. It was the construct of God. It was the way that God ordained the city to function.

But there is another city mentioned at least 450 in the bible that is the antitype of Jerusalem. It's called Babylon. Right from Genesis, right through to the book of Revelation, Babylon is always seen as the antithesis of Jerusalem. The Jews despised Babylon because Babylon represented everything that was opposite to the order of God. If a good Jew wanted to insult you, he would say, “Man, go to Babylon.”

Then the unthinkable happens. The Babylonians come and conquer Jerusalem. They break down the walls of Jerusalem and take the people of Jerusalem as slaves, or as exiles, all the way to Babylon. Here they are sitting at the river of Babylon. They have hung up their harps on the willows, the bible says. And the Babylonians come to them and say, “Hey, we hear you guys sing such beautiful songs. Don't you want to sing us a song?” Then they say, “By the rivers of Babylon, how will we sing a song in a strange land?”

You see, in their minds they were saying, “How can we exercise our spirituality? How can we exercise that which is precious to us within the context of Babylon? It represents everything that is wrong. We need to go back to Jerusalem if we want to sing, if we want to worship, if we want to express our spirituality. We can't do it in Babylon. We've got to do it in Jerusalem.”

It's within this context that God speaks to his people. Through the prophet Jeremiah God speaks to his people now in Babylon. In Jeremiah 29 (often we quote verse 11 without knowing the context), this is what verse 11 says: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of shalom and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Here God is speaking to them in Babylon! And God says, “I am dreaming dreams about you in this context.” But it must have been verse 7 that really rocked their world. He says, “Seek the peace (the shalom) of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive.” I mean, that must have been terrible to hear. God, you are actually in this. Then he says, “and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace (in its shalom) you will have peace.”

You see, here in South Florida, I think if I have to choose a spot somewhere in the world that

probably represents Babylon well, it has to be one of the short-listed ones. Tomorrow, many of you are leaving to go into different spaces within the context of South Florida, and you feel it is Babylon. Maybe, just maybe, God is saying, “I have brought you there. And seek the peace, seek the shalom, the wholeness of where I have brought you; for in its peace, when it gets whole, you will experience peace.”

Tomorrow people are going as educators into the educational environment. People are going into business. People are going into the art world, the media world. People are going into government. People are all over this space as Christ-followers. Many times when we enter those spaces, we hang up our harps. We say, “I can’t exercise what is precious here.” It is within that context that God is challenging us.

This was part of the philosophy where we started realizing that it’s so important for every individual who is a Christ-follower to understand that you are not just coming to church to be blessed and to be encouraged, but you are coming to be equipped. You are being mandated and commissioned and sent. When you leave here, you are leaving as a representative of this community of faith, and you now represent this vision of God’s shalom wherever you will go this week.

You are commissioned. If you are a teacher, you go as the Adam of God. That classroom becomes your garden, and you guard and tend it. You represent this ministry there. Can you imagine if across South Florida literally thousands of Christ-followers engaged with a sense of a mandate for carrying the life of Christ into all these spaces?

What exactly does that mean? Well, you know, that’s the strategy part. Many times people hear a sermon like this and they say, “Oh thank God, yes – I have always wanted to go and sort out my boss.” And you walk in there tomorrow with three scriptures. That’s not what we are talking about. Here is the interesting thing: When Jesus sends his disciples, he says, “I send you as lambs amongst wolves.” I don’t know about you, but if I were a disciple, I might have raised my hand and said, “Jesus, can I just get this right? You didn’t perhaps mean we are going as wolves amongst lambs?” Because it just feels like we have a little more control, influence, and authority.

No, there was a reason why Jesus was saying that. You see, we represent another kingdom. We represent another way of doing things, the way God’s world is ordered. So when we enter into this world where there is greed, we come with generosity. It’s the power of the opposite spirit. Where there is self-centeredness, we come with giving, and laying our lives down. Where there is hatred, we come with love. Where there is bitterness, we come with forgiveness. Where there is a sense of living only for yourself, we come as the people who represent a different kingdom, because we

know truth, and the truth has set us free. We don't need the approval of this system.

Here is the problem: Many Christians often engage the world with this same spirit. Yes, God is challenging us to engage our world, but we go with the same ego and the same manipulation and the same spirit -- and flesh meets flesh, just with three extra scriptures. We are not called to that. We are called to be a faithful presence, a faithful presence within the context of a community that needs to see the kingdom of God modeled. This is what I believe Paul was saying when he said, "When I am weak I am strong, because I represent the order of God, the way God does things."

It's amazing. Jesus says to the disciples when he feeds the 5000, "Go and break up this group into groups of fifties and hundreds." That must have been a challenging exercise. The disciples were not trained in crowd control, and they were definitely not the smartest there were, and here they have to go and break up this group. Why? Somehow Jesus wanted to have them in smaller groups. I think Jesus knew it was the only way he would monitor whether they were effective.

Here's the thing we need to understand. When we start asking God to engage our world, we need to find the strategy. What are the next steps? What are the things God is calling us to position ourselves, to posture ourselves to see God move?

Then Jesus does something amazing. He takes the bread and the fish and he looks up to heaven and he blesses them. Listen, Jesus doesn't go and break the bread and the fish and build a whole reserve so that the disciples can feel really secure -- at least now we know there is enough bread, enough fish. The resources now match the need.

He doesn't. He blesses, he breaks it, and he puts it in the hands of the disciples. I can just see those disciples each getting a little piece of bread and a little piece of fish. They know they have just broken up these groups and people have asked, "What are you doing?" "We are going to feed you." Here they are, standing with this little bit, and Jesus looks at them and says, "Go feed the people." Do you feel the tension in that moment? I want you to feel it, because when God commissions us, there is always this sense of tension.

I see how this disciple goes down to a group of 100 and then decides he would rather start with a group of 50. I see him breaking the first piece. I guarantee you, that first piece was a small piece. Can you imagine the guy that got the first piece? "So, this is it?" See the picture. Then I see him breaking another piece, and another piece. And as he is breaking the pieces, he has this awareness: Something miraculous is happening. Then I see him breaking a bigger piece just to test this. Then another piece, and then they break so many pieces that 12 baskets are left over. Here is the key:

Special Messages - Impacting Your World

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You have to start breaking the pieces.

Many times we know God has spoken. We know God is challenging us. We know God wants us to do something, but we don't see the resources yet. We don't see the evidence that it can happen yet. Here is the challenge to every individual -- here is the challenge even to this ministry: Just start breaking the pieces. I would like to pray for you, that by the grace of God you would sense something in you moving from concern to compassion, becoming agents of grace within the community and in this world.

Father, we are a grateful people. We stand at the receiving end of so much of your grace and your mercy. Lord, what you have done for us has affected our lives so deeply, as we reflect just on salvation and redemption. This morning, Lord, we want to think about calling and mission, not just what you have done for us, but what you want to do through us. So I bless every individual in this house. I pray for every person that has heard this word, Lord. Let us somehow be sensitive to hear what you are saying, that we will see, that we will understand, that we will posture ourselves to...