

The Offer That Changes Everything: 02/06/2005  
John Ortberg

## “The Offer That Changes Everything”

I actually want to bring you greetings today from the rest of the team from our church. A lot of you know some of our leaders and a few staff folk have been in Ethiopia this week. And I was with them earlier on, and so they asked me to bring you greetings from them. I am going to say a little bit more about what is going on in Ethiopia later on in this message. And for them, and just personally, I want to say thank you so much. So many people have been praying. We felt that and I felt that.

I had to leave early and had a 41-hour trip from Addis to Nairobi to London to Los Angeles to San Diego. I had to speak in San Diego for three hours' worth of talks, then another meeting and then come back here for this weekend—and I feel great. I don't know when I have felt more sustained by prayer for a whole weeklong. I really don't. I know that is God at work and it's because this is a praying church. I know everybody over there is feeling it. We're very excited about what God is going to be doing. I feel so strong; I might go for an hour. No, not really. Don't look so worried.

Part of the reason I was so excited to come back was because of this new series that's getting launched this weekend, which we're hoping is going to be very foundational in our life as a church. We are going to think together about the way of life that God calls us to if we're part of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, as followers of Jesus. This is kind of the big picture overview today.

I want to start with this question: how would you respond if someone were to ask you,

What is the gospel that Jesus, Himself, came to preach?

If someone were to ask you—like when Jesus said,

Now I'm going to proclaim the good news. Now I'm going to proclaim the gospel.

What would you say? What did Jesus, Himself, in His life on earth, what did He say next? What's His gospel? It sounds real simple; but I can tell you from experience that many people, maybe the majority of people in churches

in our country today, can't give you the same answer that the Bible does.

At the outset of this series, we want to get real clear on this because this is foundational. I want to look through a number of passages from Scripture, and then we will come back to this question. This is from Mark, the first chapter. Mark, Matthew and Luke all summarize Jesus' gospel, His good news, in very similar language.

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.* (Mark 1:14)

And that phrase can also be translated gospel—same thing—enaggelion [in Greek].

*...the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (v. 15)

Then He chose His disciples and He adopted a strategy to communicate one message to everybody He could. This is in Luke, Chapter 8,

*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.* (Luke 8:1)

After this He chose His disciples. Jesus traveled about from one town to another proclaiming the good news, the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He then sent His disciples to proclaim His essential message.

*When Jesus had called the twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons, to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God.* (Mark 9:1-2a)

His whole life, that was His primary teaching topic; and then He was crucified; He was raised again. When He came to the disciples after the resurrection, He spoke to them about one topic.

*He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.* (Acts 1:3)

The last glimpse we have of the early church, the last verse, in the last chapter of the book of Acts it says about the Apostle Paul,

*Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God...* (Acts 28:31)

Now, if you were going to say what Jesus' gospel is all about in one phrase, what would that one phrase be? His good news is just this: the Kingdom of

God—life in God’s presence and God’s power—has now become available to ordinary people like you and me. It’s right here, right now. Especially the good news was good news because it was true for people who thought they were a million miles away—tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, anybody who wants to know—Jesus says, in His person the Kingdom of God has now come to Earth. It’s available for anybody who wants to come in. This is Jesus’ good news.

Now, here is something I believe to be desperately tragic. Thousands of churches and millions of Christians in our day have substituted another gospel for Jesus’ gospel. The gospel that gets substituted often might be put like this,

Here are the minimal entrance requirements for getting into Heaven when you die.

Okay, we don’t use those words for it, but in many people’s minds, what they think of when they think of the gospel is, here are the minimal entrance requirements so that you can get into Heaven after you die.

Now, I have a picture I use for this sometimes from a deeply theological movie called *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. I’m sure none of you here have every seen this, but there is this scene towards the end of this film. It’s kind of a picture of the way I think a lot of people think about the gospel. King Arthur and three of his knights are in pursuit of the Holy Grail but they have to get into a castle and there is this great chasm between them and the castle.

There’s one kind of ramp over it; and there is this gatekeeper who guards it and he says to them, I’ll ask you three questions. If you can get them right, then you can go across the ramp. But, if you get them wrong, you will be cast down into the abyss. There’s a lot at stake here. The first knight comes up, and he is asked,

State your name.

He does.

What’s your quest?

He says it. And then he is asked,

What’s your favorite color?

Red.

He's amazed. He gets to cross the bridge; it's so easy. So the second knight comes up and he's pretty cocky now, and he's asked,

State your name.

He does.

What's your quest?

He says it, and then he's asked,

What's the capital of Assyria?"

He says,

I don't know.

(Audible scream) And, he's cast down into the abyss. So the third knight comes up and he's terrified. He's quaking.

What's your name?

He says it.

What's your quest?

He says it.

What's your favorite color?

He's so scared that he says

red—no, blue.

(Audible scream) and then he is cast down into the abyss. So now there is just Arthur, and the gatekeeper asks him,

State your name.

I'm Arthur, King of the Britons.

What's your quest?

I search the Holy Grail. Then he is asked a question, and if you've seen this film, you know it's a running gag through the whole movie.

What's the air speed velocity of a coconut-laden swallow?

Arthur's response is also a running gag throughout the whole movie,

Well, it depends, is it an African swallow or a European swallow?

The bridge keeper says,

I don't know that.

(Audible scream) and the bridge keeper is cast down into the abyss.

Okay, now a lot of people's understanding of the gospel is that some day—they have kind of reduced it to this—there's going to be this ramp to the castle over on the other side; and the gospel is this secret answer to the question. If you get it right, means that God will let you go across into the castle. Here's the problem: where in the New Testament does Jesus ever say,

Now I'm going to give you the minimum entrance requirements for getting into Heaven when you die?"

Where does Jesus ever say that? Where does Jesus ever say that? He never says that. What does He say? He says,

*...here's the good news.*

Dallas Willard, who I think is the best writer on this in our day, puts it like this,

***All the preliminaries have been taken care of, and the Kingdom of God is now accessible to everyone. Review your plans for living and base your life on this remarkable opportunity.***

That's His good news. That's Jesus' gospel.

Now, of course, Jesus' gospel includes the forgiveness of our sins as a free gift of grace based on His death in our place on the cross. Of course, Jesus' gospel includes the promise that death will not have the last word, that our eternal kind of life with God will never, ever, ever, ever cease. Of course, Jesus' gospel means those things, but it includes more than that. Jesus came as the Kingdom Bringer to this earth. Jesus came with good news,

The Kingdom of God is now present,

He said,

in My body, in My life. You can see it. You can touch it. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life.

A lot of people think the only real reason Jesus came to earth was to die on the cross. But, that is not true. His death on the cross was just one part of His overall mission. His overall mission was to be the Kingdom Bringer. That is why He says things like, in the sixth chapter of Matthew,

***Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?*** (Matthew 6:25)

He's talking to people who pretty much believe in God, but He says,

***Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.***

Or, what kind of job shall I get or what kind of a house am I going to be able to live in, or how much money am I going to get. Jesus said,

***For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them...But seek first the Kingdom of God***" (Matthew 6:32-33)

...and His righteousness and His way of life and all this other stuff will fall into place.

Jesus' one gospel was the gospel of the availability of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' one purpose was to model, to manifest the reality of that Kingdom in His life, and His death, and His resurrection, in His teachings, in His actions. All these promises in the Old Testament that when the Kingdom of God comes, when God is fully reigning, it's going to be good news for poor people, and for blind people, and for lame people, and Jesus does healings and manifests in His life the reality that the kingdom has come and it is good news.

His one command:

Pursue the kingdom.

His one plan—for His people to extend the kingdom. Yet millions of people who name His name cannot tell you what His Kingdom is. I think that's really sad. So, as a church we want to be a Kingdom people.

We want to start in this series by just getting a kind of basic understanding of what it is about—because we don't use the word kingdom much. In Jesus'

day, people did. When He said the Kingdom of God, people had a kind of understanding about that; but to us, it sounds kind of medieval or archaic. Kings are men; and we kind of wonder what's up with all that stuff, so let's just say a word about that.

Everybody has a kingdom, in a biblical sense. Your kingdom is that little sphere in which what you say, goes. Your kingdom is—the technical language for it is—it's the range of your effective will. This is why it is so important that you have a body because in the beginning, your kingdom is your body. You choose what your body is going to do and it does it. That is why having a body is so important. God is giving you a little taste of kingdom.

People learn early on they were made to have a kingdom. And that is why we don't like to be told what to do by somebody else. We don't want their kingdom violating our kingdom. This is why a two-year old's favorite word is, "No." They are learning that they have a kingdom.

Little kids in the back seat of a car draw a line. Better not cross over to this side of the line because when you do, you're coming into my kingdom. That's your kingdom over there. My kingdom starts here. They start defending their kingdom. They have a little war about where your kingdom stops and where my kingdom starts. Then dad turns around, because whose kingdom does dad think the car is? He thinks it is his kingdom. He will ask them,

Kids, do you want me to come back there?

And they're thinking,

Sure dad, you're going to come back here while the car's doing 80 miles an hour going down the expressway.

So dad sends Mr. Hand back to the backseat like a snake. The kids retreat to the corner. Ken Davis gives advice on how to get them out of the unreachable safety zone. A tap on the brakes brings them right into play. Thy kingdom come.

My kingdom is the range of my effective will; that is where things go the way that I want them to go. Having a kingdom is a real good thing. It is part of why you were created. It goes all the way back to the beginning. God says about human beings,

*Let us make human beings in our own image according to our likeness and let them have dominion,* (Genesis 1:26)

That is kingdom language right there in the creation of human beings, what it means to be made in the image of God, to have dominion. Just by the way, that's one of the reasons why when you read Jesus' teaching about leadership or authority or power, almost always He speaks about those things in terms of warnings because it is so hard to lead people without violating their dominion status. It is so easy when you lead to use pressure or coercion or fear or manipulate people or appeal to stuff that is going to be the wrong kind of fuel inside them. It's so hard to lead in a way that doesn't violate dominion status and that is part of the beauty and wonder of God and of the kind of person Jesus was. His picture of community is like where dominion is never violated for anybody—where the strong don't violate folks that seem to be weak because everybody was made to be powerful in the pursuit of the good. There is nothing like the way that Jesus taught and understands life and makes sense of the world—there is nothing like it.

Okay, everybody is made to have a kingdom. Our kingdoms are all junked up by sin. Now on earth, take all our little kingdoms—yours and mine—they intersect and merge and they form bigger kingdoms, they form families, and schools, and companies, and corporations, and nations. Economic, political, cultural systems—kingdoms are just systems of personal power and control. We could call this whole conglomeration where we live, the Kingdom of Earth.

In yours and mine, the way that they merge and intersect and then we can do a study in contrast. Jesus says that there is this sphere, this society, this community that He calls the Kingdom of God; or sometimes, especially in the Gospel of Matthew it will be called the Kingdom of Heaven, but I'm not going to get into that right now, but it is basically the same thing, I believe. It is the range of God's effective will. It is wherever God's will is done, the sphere in which everything that happens meets with God's approval and delight. Everything is precisely the way that God wants it to be. What does that look like? Well most of what Jesus did when He taught—this is His number one topic—He tried to clarify for people what is this really? So that they would understand, because when people come to understand it, they want this more than anything else—when they understand it right. So Jesus would say things like,

***Whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God.*** (Matthew 18:4)

Is it like that on Earth? Is humility a ticket to greatness down here? In God's kingdom it is. He says the Kingdom of God

***...is like a banquet to which the poor, the blind, the lame, the crippled all get invited.*** (Luke 14:13)

Paul says

*...the Kingdom of God is not a matter of legalistic rules about what you eat or drink. It's not about legalism, but a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy.* (Romans 14:17)

So just imagine for a moment. Just imagine a society where there is no pride, no arrogance, no big shots. A society where people are constantly on the lookout for anybody who might feel lonely or rejected so they could be celebrated and loved. A society where no one does anything petty or small minded, no gossip, no cruelty, no fear, and where watching over all of this creativity and goodness as its greatest servant and most joyful inhabitant is this magnificent God and Father of Jesus, who is endlessly celebrated for His infinite love. This, Jesus says, is the Kingdom of God and it exists. It's going on right now. It's doing really well.

Then there is this other entity, which again, to use kingdom language or to use biblical language, is called the Kingdom of Earth. How are things going in this kingdom right now? Who does it look like is running this show down here?

I saw a movie a couple of weeks ago that I would recommend. It's called *Hotel Rwanda*, a story of genocide to the tune of about a million corpses left in one country. The whole world pretty much knew and pretty much did nothing. Suicide bombers, drive by shootings, 50 percent divorce rate, ghettos, barrios, greed and corruption in real high places, lives messed up by addictions.

Jim Wallace, who is going to be here to speak in the Sanctuary in a couple of weeks, told me a while ago that in our world 30,000 children die everyday of preventable diseases, malnutrition, lack of good drinking water—stuff that we could fix if our world had a will to. You think about this, these are kids that a mom and dad love, like you and I do, 30,000 kids will die today.

Think things are going pretty good down here? Jesus had this plan. Jesus said, I'm going to make "up there" come down here. I'm going to bring this life down into this sphere. He taught about this a lot. He said when people get this and they understand what I'm up to, they will give up anything to be a part of this because it is so good. One of the places where He expressed this is His most famous prayer. It is a prayer that all of us have heard. We said it together a little while ago, but a lot of people don't think much when they are saying it.

Ken Davis writes back in the '80s when the Chicago Bears had their really good football team, when the Bears won the Super Bowl. Some of you remember that team. Greatest Super Bowl that has ever been played. There

was a meeting one time in the locker room and Ditka, the coach, when it was done asked William Perry—remember Refrigerator Perry, real big guy?—asked him if he would pray The Lord’s Prayer—lead the team in the praying of The Lord’s Prayer. Jim McMann is standing next to him, it was either Ken Davis, or a friend of his, who was standing next to Ken who says,

Oh, this will be good. There is no way Perry knows The Lord’s Prayer. I will bet you \$50 that the Frig does not know The Lord’s Prayer.

Now that’s kind of an odd wager. But Ken said,

All right, you’re on.

So they have a \$50 bet going and everybody bows their head and the Frig looks very awkward and uncomfortable. Finally he begins to pray,

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

And McMann kind of shakes his head in disgust; hands Ken \$50 and says,

Man, I was sure he didn’t know The Lord’s Prayer.

We just kind of go in autopilot during that deal, everybody’s heard it before, don’t think much about it, so let’s think about it for a moment. Jesus, taught us to pray,

***Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name.*** ” (Matthew 6:9

In other words, many people come to understand what a wonderful being You are. What a fabulous community would be gathered around someone like You.

***Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done.***

Okay, that’s kingdom. Your kingdom come, and He’s going to say what that means.

***Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.*** (v. 10)

Do you think He was really serious about that? Do you think that could really happen? Or, was He just kind of blowing smoke? Are those just pretty words? See, it’s interesting to me. Jesus never taught His followers to pray,

God, get me out of here so I can go up there.

He never taught us to pray the Star Trek prayer. Any Star Trek fans here? Remember any time somebody got in trouble in Star Trek, what was their prayer? Beam me up, Scotty. Jesus didn't say, pray this prayer: Father who art in Heaven, beam me up.

A lot of people, many Christians unfortunately, believe that my job is to get the after life destination taken care of and then kind of tread water until we all get ejected and God comes and torches this whole place. That is not what Jesus taught. He never said: pray like this,

Get me out of here so I can go up there.

He said, pray oh God, oh God, make up there come down here into my life and

into my home group,  
into my church,  
my office,  
my school,  
my family,  
my neighborhood,  
my city,  
my country, this whole, sorry dark world.

God, make up there come down here.

The question is, Do you think that really could happen? Do you think God could really do that? That was Jesus' plan. That was the good news that He proclaimed. It includes the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of life ever after as a gift of grace, but it includes more than that. It starts here. It starts now. He had a concrete strategy for this. Here is where it starts to hit home for those of us who follow Jesus in this community.

This was Jesus' strategy and He only had one: that He would form out of His followers a Spirit-empowered new community that would model for the world a radically alternative way of life through which the Kingdom of God would begin to break into this sorry, dark world. Let me say that one more time. Jesus' strategy was to form out of His followers a Spirit-empowered new community that would model for the world a radically alternative way of life through which the Kingdom of God would begin to break into this sorry dark world.

The reason that we are starting this series, it's called **The Way**, is we want to think and study and pray together about what is the way of life that we are called to as Jesus' followers who have been given this mission—to be a different kind of people living a different way of life. We are going to

immerse ourselves in the words I am about to read—over the next couple of months, over the next seven weeks. This is our calling.

There is a description of a community that actually came into being through the power of God. They are described in the second chapter of Acts. Our leadership team went away for a retreat last fall; and I'll bet we read these words ten times, no kidding. Each week when we gather from that time to this time, we keep reading these words again and then at the end just pray,

God, may it be so.

It happened before, make it happen again.

*They devoted themselves...*

That's a real strong word. It's not a word about casual commitment, not something they did when it was convenient, not just one add-on to a real busy life.

*They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods; they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

It can happen again.

What I want to do in the minutes that are left in this message is to just give you some kind of a road map for where this series is headed. We talked about this last month—if you're a home group leader or a ministry leader. We want to be characterized by these three dynamics—kind of three spheres in which the kingdom is breaking into in our world.

You can remember it just by the letters T – L – C. You all know what T – L – C stands for? Usually it stands for Tender Loving Care. I want to make it something else. For us as a church, last night at 6:30, I think I was still a little on Ethiopian time because I spelled it L – T – C, and then I asked everybody,

You all know what these letters stand for?

and everybody just sat there. Not a good moment. But the T for us as a

church—and again this is kind of where we are headed over the next seven weeks and what we really want to be about as a church—God is calling us to—

### **Transformation.**

The prayer is at this level,

God, make up there come down here in my body, in my life, in me—transform me.

Anybody here got any bad habits?

Ever gossip?

Anybody here ever worry?

Anybody here ever do any self-promotion?

Ever get judgmental?

Ever avoid needy confrontation that you know you ought to have with somebody else but you just don't want to do it so you don't?

Do you ever bend the truth a little bit to get out of trouble even though you know that it is wrong?

Ever hold on to a grudge because it just feels good to hold onto a grudge?

Ever have impure thoughts or engage in impure actions?

Ever get cold and withdraw from somebody even though you know it's a violation of love?

Ever get impatient with another person?

Ever get stubborn or offense, or passive/aggressive or closed-minded?

Anybody have any bad habits?

I'm a pastor. It took me about 30 seconds to come up with that whole list. Do you know why? Because my wife does every one of those things. No, because that's me—that's me. Doesn't take me long to come up with a list like that. Jesus says, pray, God make it come down here starting with my life. Now, it's the gospel.

See so many people get confused on this. What happens for so many people is they think the gospel is,

What are the minimal entrance requirements for getting into Heaven after I die?

As long as I have taken care of that stuff, then this stuff is just kind of optional. I can engage in it if I want to; but if I don't want to I don't have to because I've got the Heaven deal already taken care of because I have satisfied the minimal entrance requirements.

No. The gospel is,

God's making up there come down here in my life and into this world and if you want it, then it's yours. Just ask Him for it, become My follower.

But if you don't want this, then you don't want Jesus' gospel. You may want something else but it's not His gospel. God, make up there come down here starting with me. And, of course, if we ever understand what that would really look like—to live that way—we would want it more than anything else. We'd get it right. Not a lot of distorted ideas, but that's why Jesus spent so much time saying, this is what it is really like. You've heard it said, but this is what it is really like. And it really started to happen.

There was once a community—there was once a community where a wavering, impulsive, fear-filled man named Simon became Peter, *petra*, the rock. There was once a community where a hateful, spiteful, self-righteous man by the name of Saul became a missionary who poured his life out for the very people that he used to hate because he loved them so much—named Paul. There was once a community where a man named Joseph, a wealthy guy who piled up more and more wealth, became such an extravagant lover of people with his words and his resources that they gave him the new name Barnabus, son of encouragement. There was once a community like that. And if God did it before, He can do it again. Has the Spirit lost its power?

### **L is for Love.**

There was once a community where people began to be transformed to such an extent that the community was filled with so much love that it just became like an irresistible magnet.

Love God and love your neighbor,

Jesus said. And the prayer here is,

God, make up there come down here in our church, in Christ's body.

God, make up there come down here in my body. Make up there come down here in Christ's body in our community and in our church. Love God and love each other so much that we become an alternative culture following the new way of life. There was once a community where this happened. People who had always stayed far apart from each other, came together. The rich and the poor began to love each other so much that people who had stuff just started giving so that nobody would have to be in need. Slaves and free sat down to worship together. Male and female trusted and loved each other. Jew and Gentile, who wouldn't touch each other with a ten-foot pole, became brothers and sisters.

There was once a community where the walls that separated the human race for centuries just started coming down. And wounds started to get healed. And racism and sexism and hatred and enmity started to get healed. The world had never seen a community like this. This is just true. This is a matter of historical record. Whether or not you believe the Bible, the world had never seen a community like this before. Can God do it again? Can He do it here?

### **Then C is for Calling.**

The idea here is that we're to become kingdom bearers to the world around us. The prayer here is God, make up there come down here in my world. Make up there come down here in my body. Make up there come down here in my church. Make up there come down here in my world. What does that look like? I'll give you a little flavor of it. Part of the prayer that we're going to pray as a church in this next season of our life is:

God, make up there come down here in Ethiopia.

I want to show you a few photos of folks we saw this last week.

The man on the far left helps head up one of our ministry partners called Hope International. The woman right next to him is a blind woman. The girl in the red sweater is her daughter who goes to Hope. The little boy in that little hooded jacket is her son; he's three or four years old. She's blind. She survives by begging. It is the only way that she can make any money. When she walked into that room, she walked holding the hand of her three-year-old son because what he does all day is just take his mom places. That is the only way she has of being able to go anywhere. And Jesus says,

When the kingdom comes, it's good news for the blind.

The girl in the green sweater is a 12-year-old girl who goes to Hope. She has a 14-year-old sister and they have no mom, no dad, no money. All they've got is just each other.

Next picture.

What you are looking at there is a few of our team members and they are standing in someone's home. It's those sticks together; it's maybe 10 by 10. You see kind of a foam mattress thing, that's somebody's home.

There was an article in the *Chronicle* today; I don't know how many of you read it about what kind of house you can buy for a million dollars. We think a lot about our houses—how they are furnished. Then they had pictures of different parts of the country and what you could buy for a million dollars in

Atlanta, what you could buy for a million dollars in Florida—sort of a how hard life is for us who live here because it's hard to buy a nice house for a million dollars. That was kind of the gist of the article, what a hard thing it is for us to live where we live because it's hard to buy a nice house for a million dollars here.

Jesus says,

When the kingdom starts coming, it's good news for the poor.

Next picture.

That's another home and we met the woman who lives there. She lives there with ten children. The mom there is about 40 years old now. She was married when she was ten years old by her family—married when she was ten years old to a 50-year-old man. I have two daughters. You think about it. They don't know: is she going to survive? How can we make sure that she has enough bread to eat to live? Now that she is 40 she looks like she is in her seventies and had a really hard life—40 years old.

One more picture.

When the kingdom comes, Jesus says, the greatest in it will be someone that makes themselves like a little humble child. One of our team members, we were at one place, we got to be part of feeding folks at one time, and one time a mom came to one of our team members and she had a baby. She held the baby up to our team member like this, just saying,

Will you take my baby. I don't know if my baby is going to grow up living here. You live in a place where there is a lot of money and a lot of food. Would you take my baby?

Jesus says,

When the kingdom starts coming, it's good news and I got a plan. I'm going to form a new community that follows a radically different way of life, creates an alternative culture, makes up there come down here.

We do not exist at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church—we do not exist to be a religious services provider. We do not exist to create good programs that can be pleasant experiences for us. We do not exist so that people who live the same, insane, driven, success-addicted lifestyle as everybody else in our culture can come once a week to hear a comforting message. We exist because Jesus' plan was to create an alternative community of Spirit-empowered people who would follow in His way and would devote themselves to praying and living so that up there can come down here. That

is why we exist. That is what we are called for, you and I.

God did it before and God can do it again. His Spirit has lost none of its power—where there are people who with glad and sincere hearts will devote themselves.

So, I am asking you at the start of this series, will you devote yourself?—because, it's happening. Every time you are in conflict with somebody and you want to hurt them or gossip or avoid them, but instead you go to them and seek reconciliation, the kingdom is breaking into the world. Every time you have a chunk of something—money or time or energy and instead of just spending it on yourself, you decide to pour it out to somebody who is hungry or homeless or poor—the kingdom is breaking into the world. Every time somebody is addicted but they want to know God so much that they will come into the light and get help from the community, then the kingdom is breaking into the world. It broke in one day through Jesus and He formed a little community and it got a little toehold in Jerusalem; then it spread to Samaria, then it spread one day to Ethiopia. It spread one day to Menlo Park. God can do it again. And that is what we are going to do for the next seven weeks.

Come back next week and we are going to consider what transformation really looks like; and I'll just tell you right now, it's really good news, what it means to be a transformed person is really good news. It will make you so glad that if you're a singer, you're going to want to sing the Hallelujah Chorus. If you're a dancer, you're going to want to dance. If you're a Baptist, you're almost going to want to dance. It's really good news. But, between now and then next week, just make this your prayer:

God, make up there come down here.

Let's pray.