

If Your god is not God, Fire Him

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. Let me hear you say good morning. It's good to hear your voice. It's good to be all in this place at the same time. I'm just so thrilled and honored to be able to be here with you.

Hello to those who are watching online. We are live now, so we've changed some things around. Our live stream happens Sunday at 10 o'clock, so hello to you folks watching right now or sometime in the future.

And we are also reopening our downtown location tonight at 5 o'clock. And so if you treat church like you treat a COVID vaccine and you need a couple of them, you can come tonight as well.

And you can talk to the CDC about any recommendations you may have about that. This month marks two years that I have been your pastor.

And I'm glad to be able to say that because it's been an interesting two years. As you all know, I don't need to go into why. And this sermon, as I've been preparing for it, just kind of felt like one of those VIs, very important sermons.

[1 : 1 4] Because there's been a lot of things on my mind about how we as a church relate to this reality, this divine reality we call God. When Emily and I were driving down the road on Friday and we saw some banners.

I saw it actually on a few churches now about a church that had scheduled a revivalist for a revival for, you know, some later time in March.

And I made the snarky comments to my wife Emily like, oh, revivals. I forgot that you could schedule those. You could, like, put them on the calendar. And my church did this too. My church would do, you know, yearly revivals.

You put it on the calendar. You hire the revivalist preacher to come in. And they would, you know, preach these sort of hellfire and brimstone messages to get your life back on track with God.

You could schedule revival. And I've been one of these very, very fortunate people that ever since I was a kid, I've always known that I wanted to be a pastor. I felt really the call to ministry when I was, like, 14 or so.

[2 : 1 8] But even as a young kid, like seven or eight, I had been living with somebody who was mentally unhealthy. And some of that unhealth had rubbed off onto me as well.

And so I had these delusions of grandeur that I would be the next John the Baptist. And at my preaching, Jesus would return. But I remember when these revivalists would come to town, I remember thinking this would be the dream job.

Because you could go to a church. You could travel around, see different cities and experiences and cultures. You could go. You could preach and scare people into Jesus. And then you could just leave.

And you did not have to do any of that hard, messy work of, like, actually pastoring people. And even as, like, a 22, 23-year-old, as I entered into professional ministry, I was a worship director.

I was, you know, working at a church about the same size as this one, maybe a little bit bigger, and working with volunteers and beginning that life of pastoring and ministry.

[3 : 25] And even then, as I had matured a little bit, I still wanted to do just, like, the details of ministry. I wanted to schedule the music and lead the rehearsals, but not actually, like, care for people.

But as I've gotten older, I'm going to be 35 this month, I have come to grow and learn and love pastoring people, shepherding people, caring for them.

And over the past two years that I've been here as your pastor, I have had this interesting experience that, you know, all of the normal details of church kind of got shifted away to the side for a while, thanks to the pandemic.

So there wasn't, for a season, there wasn't all of this. It was all happening with video cameras and basements and editing and all that kind of stuff. And all the, I don't know, I would say sometimes extraneous details of church got left behind.

And what I was left with was a pro Zoom account and a you-can-book-me link and lots and lots of people who wanted to do pastoral counseling. Because you, you all, many of you, you've been running into, you know, the things that a good therapist will say you should probably talk to a spiritual professional about that.

[4 : 50] And so you came to me and you'd have these questions about what is God like and what is God's character and what do I do with this religious trauma and the spiritual abuse that's been happening in my life.

And we would talk and we would pray and we would have those kinds of discussions. And I am very different than the 7-year-old and the 14-year-old and the 22-year-old that I used to be, where I don't want to go travel around and scare you away from hell and Jesus.

Rather, I want to love you and care for you and pray for you and do that long, multi-year work of us rediscovering what God is like together.

So if you have a Bible, I invite you to find the book of Exodus chapter 3 and then you can, you know, put your phone down or put your thumb in that place.

We'll get there in a little bit. But as I've been meeting and talking and chatting and counseling you, I've found these commonalities, these themes about what we're all talking about, of trying to figure out who God is really, what God is really like and who God is and what does this whole Jesus thing mean.

[6 : 05] And I'm going to say some things and I guarantee there are people in this room that you're going to hear me say these things. You're going to like, hey, you're breaching confidentiality. But I promise you, this is not only your story.

This is like all you all story. These are the commonalities, these are the themes that keep coming up. So if you hear something that like, hey, that is exactly what I said to you, I promise you that you said it to me and six others did as well.

All right. So these are some of the themes that have come up in my pastoral care and counseling. A sense that you feel like God is out to get you. That if you have changed your behavior or your ethics in some way, particularly around sexual ethics, you're not so sure that you'll get into heaven anymore.

Feeling depressed, either just like a general, you know, sadness or clinically so. And because of that, you just know that God is disappointed in you.

Because you didn't trust God enough. Maybe you've changed your beliefs on hell or salvation or ethics. And you feel like the bad luck that's happened in your life just has to be God trying to send you a message that you're wrong.

[7 : 15] On the flip side, we've had conversations about no longer feeling the need to be accountable to a community because the communities that you've been accountable to before hurt you, spiritually traumatized you, and you don't want to make that same mistake.

We've talked about being traumatized by spiritually abusive pastors and churches, and therefore you just find yourself unwilling or unable to put yourselves in positions of responsibility or difficulty through the fear of the same thing happening again.

You've become shy or embarrassed about the whole idea of evangelism because everyone goes to heaven in the end anyway, right? And you're unsure, maybe, that God even wants or is capable of caring for you in any sort of personal way.

Now, back in the 1940s and 50s, there were a couple different writers, Christian writers, and they had a couple pithy sayings about what they thought was the most important thing about a person.

And one of the writers said, the most important thing about you is what you think about God. A.W. Tozer actually put it this way.

[8 : 29] He says that history of humankind will probably show that no person has ever risen above their religion. And humanity's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.

Worship is pure or as base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. And we tend, by some secret law of the soul, to move toward our mental image of God.

And it's not just true of the individual Christian, Tozer writes, but of the company of Christians that compose the church. Always the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God.

So it was what one writer put. A different writer put it this way. The most important thing about you is not what you think of God, but what you think God thinks about you. Not just merely what you think about God, but what you think God thinks about you.

And so if you live under the assumption that God is out to get you, this is going to shape your life in a particular way. And actually, there's a whole field called neurotheology that has explored these ideas, where you take people who believe in a variety of different kinds of religions and faiths and concepts of God, and then you start doing CAT scans and MRIs on their brain to measure what their beliefs, how that affects their brain.

[9 : 46] And so inside your brain, your brain is about the size of two fists. Inside of it, there's a little walnut-sized thing called the amygdala. The amygdala is what controls your fight, flight, fear, anger response.

And so if you worship a God that inspires fear in you, that inspires anger about those who are not like you and don't believe in the same God as you, your amygdala literally grows larger.

It's like a muscle that becomes more and more capable of kick-starting you into fight, flight, anger, and fear. But if you're the kind of person who worships a God that is more about love, compassion, forgiveness, rationality, then you've got this little sheet of paper over your brain called the prefrontal cortex, and that's the part that controls your ability to experience healthy emotion and relationality with other people.

And if you worship a God who is relational, then that part of your brain literally grows with that God that you worship. This is neurotheology. You can take a look at a book by Andrew Newberg called How God Changes the Brain.

So what these two writers in the early 20th century are saying, something is true about it. What we think about God and what we think God thinks about us changes us in a real, tangible way.

[11 : 07] Now, in my couple years here at the Table Church, I've observed two kinds of faith, among a variety of others, but these would be sort of the two extremes.

One is what sociologists call moralistic therapeutic deism. There's a mouthful for you. Two, moralistic has to do with morals. Therapeutic has to do with something about you feeling good.

Deism, that there's a God, but that God is distant. And the basic tenets of moralistic therapeutic deism are this. Number one, God wants people to be nice and fair, that's that morals part, to each other as taught in the Bible and most world religions.

It's something to do about your behavior. Number two, the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Here's the therapeutic part.

Number three, God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life, life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. So God can stay distant, but in moments of desperation, we can hopefully call that God to our aid.

[12 : 12] And then number four, good people go to heaven when they die. Again, that moralistic piece about our afterlife, the life after death has something to do with our behavior.

So that's one extreme, moralistic therapeutic deism. And then the other one, which I admittedly run into much more common, particularly in these pastoral counseling sessions, is what I have labeled, another mouthful, deterministic, misanthropic theism.

All right, welcome to your 400-level college class, all right? All right, so number one, this is what some of you all have been raised with, have been told is the right thing to believe.

God sees people as basically depraved and needing punishment, but anyone who claims Christ, God ignores their brokenness and sees only Jesus instead.

That's that misanthropic, to hate humanity. God's basic posture towards us creation is, we're not worthy of love and something has to be done about it.

[13 : 18] So number two, the central rule of life is to stay in God's good graces by following the rules, lest God be reminded of what you're truly like. So right now our lives are hidden in Christ, but if we step out of line, God will be like, you're not Jesus, I have to smite you.

Number three, God has one single plan for your life, which must be discovered by you. It's hidden otherwise, you've got to figure it out, and God doesn't hide it in a fortune cookie, you've got to do it by trial and error, and detours from that plan will be punished.

That's that deterministic part, that there is one plan for your life, you've got to figure it out. If you don't, then you have gone against God's will. Number four, vanishingly few elect souls or chosen people go to heaven when they die, and your responsibility, friends, until death, is to make sure that number goes up.

If not, it's your fault. Now, it's rare that you see it laid out in such kind of blatant terms, that these are the sorts of conversations that I've been having.

There's this will for my life, and if I don't know what it is, is God angry at me? So what does any of this have to do with Exodus? We've been in the book of Exodus and talking about the variety of things that God desires to deliver us, to save us from.

[14 : 41] And we're talking around this big idea of salvation. What is it to be saved? And today's main idea is this. God wants to deliver us, to save us from bad ideas about what God is like.

Because I basically agree with these two concepts that we talked about earlier. One of the most important things about us is what we believe about God and what we believe that God thinks about us. Because these have actual impact in our life and how society sets itself up, the social structure of who's in and who's out and who deserves help and who doesn't.

If we have concepts about God that are misanthropic and deterministic or moralistic, then we will set up our society in harmful ways.

So Exodus is a book that starts this mission of God wanting to save us from misconceptions about God's character. Now, Scripture, we have a complicated relationship with as a church.

I'll say, I'll go out on a limb and say, of, you know, perhaps you've been part of a church that the Bible was the sole word of God, infallible and inerrant. And if you said anything that wasn't in the Bible, then it could not possibly be true to varying degrees.

[15 : 59] And so perhaps you've come out of that, but now you treat Scripture with a wee little bit of suspicion. I've told our small group this, and Lee and I lead a dinner party, and I've joked with them that one of the main themes of our dinner party is the Bible, colon, why?

So to remind you, a couple weeks ago, we talked about a few axioms about Scripture, an axiom being this sort of reduce it down to its bare simplicity, what is Scripture? And Mike McCarg, you may know him as the podcaster Science Mike, says this, this, the Bible is at least a collection of books and writings assembled by the church that chronicles a people's experiences with and understanding of God over more than a thousand years.

And even if that's a comprehensive definition of the Bible, study of Scripture is warranted to understand our culture and the way in which many, many people come to know God.

So that's the at least statement. Scripture is at least that. Notice there's no words about inspiration or inerrancy or authority or infallibility. That's the at least statement.

It's at least a collection of people's experiences about God. But what would an at most statement look like? What are the classic claims about Scripture?

[17 : 18] So here's my attempt at it. The Bible, this is my belief, not only contains the witness of people's experiences with God, it also, comma, in places, comma, contains divine revelation about the nature of God, creation, and humanity that we would not otherwise know.

The primary filter by which we sort out what is merely human witness, which is worth knowing, and what is divine revelation is the person and the life and the testimony of Jesus Christ, who Christians have historically understood to be God in the flesh.

So this is the idea of divine revelation. God wants to deliver us, to save us from misconceptions about God. And the way that God does that is through revelation, through revealing God's self in creation to people, and then people wrote those experiences down.

Now, I'm comfortable saying that sometimes people garbled it up, messed it up. But the unique Christian claim is that Jesus was the ultimate revelation of what God was like.

And so all claims about divine revelation must be filtered through what Jesus did, what Jesus said, the kind of life and death that Jesus lived and died and then was resurrected from.

[18 : 43] Now, the Bible's not the only form of divine revelation. The ultimate revelation of God's character is a person called Jesus. Brad Jerzak says this about the Word of God.

The Word of God is inerrant and infallible, and when he was a teenager, he grew a beard. It'll take a few of you a minute to get that. So the Word of God is a person, but there's also other ways that God reveals things about God's self.

Human experience. We get to know God's character by getting to know each other. When we pray as a small group or a dinner party, I often pray that God would reveal something about God's self in the way that someone speaks tonight.

God reveals something about God's self through reason and science. The heavens declare the glory of God, the Psalms say. Even the stars and the earth and telescopes and microscopes all say something true about God.

And then there's community tradition, and not just Christian tradition, but a variety of traditions throughout time and space all are getting at what is true about reality and the divine reality at the center of it all.

[19 : 56] Now, what makes Christianity unique is our particular singular focus on the person of Jesus, who Christians have historically understood to be God in the flesh, and therefore the most accurate description and revelation of what God is like.

And, no matter maybe what you've heard in the past 10, 20, 30 years, Christians historically have not said that other religions or traditions are unable to reveal true things about God.

They do, in fact. But what Christians have typically made a truth claim about is that other traditions or religions are less likely to be accurate about the nature of God because we believe that Jesus is the most accurate revelation of God.

So, in Exodus chapter 3, what we're looking at is one of these human experiences of divine revelation. So, we're going to actually look at two passages today.

We're going to look at Exodus 3 and Exodus 34 to take a look at one of these moments of divine revelation. Now, we're skipping over some of the, I would say, stereotypical parts of the Exodus story.

[21 : 09] So, I would invite you to read through Exodus 1, 2, 3, if you want to go watch Prince of Egypt or a Bible Project video on YouTube, which might be more accurate than DreamWorks.

But to do a very brief bit of recap, Moses is born under the watchful eye of the midwives who are publicly disobeying the law of Pharaoh.

Moses is hidden in an ark covered with tar and placed in a river. Here and out of the river, Moses is drawn up by the princess of Egypt, Pharaoh's daughter.

He is raised as a two-culture individual. When he's about 40 years old, he murders one of the Egyptians, flees to the desert, gets married, and becomes a shepherd away from his own people, the Israelites and the Egyptians.

And when he's about 80 years old, he goes and chases a sheep up a mountain called Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai, and there is a burning bush out of which God speaks.

[22 : 10] How's that for a summary? When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him, this is verse 4, from within the bush, Moses, Moses.

And Moses said, Here I am. Do not come any closer, God said. Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground. And then God said, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God of Jacob.

And at this, Moses hid his face. Pay attention to this. Moses' response is to hide because he was afraid to look at God. And the Lord said, Now, in your Bible, if you see capital letters Lord, L-O-R-D, what that is, is a Jewish or Israelite tendency to not say or write the divine name out loud or on paper out of deep respect and reverence for it.

And so Lord is the Hebrew word Adonai, but it was a stand-in word for the divine name which we're about to meet in just a couple verses here, Yahweh, Y-H-W-H.

So the Lord, Yahweh, said, I have indeed, now listen to these verbs, seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers.

[23 : 29] I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of all these folks.

Verse 9, And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? And God kind of ignores that question and says, I will be with you.

Who am I? Moses asks. I will be with you, Yahweh replies. And this will be a sign to you that it is I who have sent you when you have brought the people out of Egypt. You will worship God on this mountain.

Verse 13, So Moses says to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me and they ask me, What's his name? Then what should I tell them? So Moses asks question number two, Who am I?

[24 : 31] is the first question. Who are you? is the second question. And God says, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am has sent me to you.

And God said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, The Lord, the God of your fathers, Yahweh, has sent me to you. Now in the Hebrew, that I am who I am is the to be verb.

So in English, we have a version of this. We have the verb to be. Am is, are, was, were, being, then, have been, all that.

Okay? Did you know that? Okay, good. It's a weird verb. It's similarly weird in Hebrew. There's this word about existence and being, am-ness, that God is claiming for God's name.

So God, Moses asks, Who are you? And God says, that whole concept of existence, of being, of am-ness, that's my name.

[25 : 39] God is the ground of all being, the ground of existence. And this is Genesis 1, Genesis 2 sort of stuff. God speaks and it becomes so because God is the being by which all things become so.

So God is making this claim about God's self that yes, there may be these other little gods who are all overseeing their bits of geography and territory, but above it all, there is one I am God who is the ground of all being and existence.

Now, go back to that previous slide, Heidi. Look at these verbs again. These verbs about what God is like. A God of action, a God that is not far off, not the God of deism.

God is somewhere else unless maybe I need him. But a God who is dipping God's self down into creation. I've seen, I've heard, I know, I've come down, I'm going to take them, I'm going to bring them, I've seen how much, so get going, I am sending.

Revelation requires response. When God reveals something about God's self, then there must be a human response to that revelation of letting old ideas about God go so that we can now be formed by what is true about this ground of being, this power of all existence.

[27 : 01] Now, this revelation continues. So, we're skipping way ahead over to Exodus 34. Actually, 33 to begin with.

This is after the giving of the Ten Commandments. Again, check out your local cartoons to understand what I'm talking about. And after God has done, given all of this law, Moses makes this claim, or this ask.

Verse 18, now show me your glory. Now, there's a whole big character arc that we can track from the Moses of Exodus 3, Moses who hides himself, and the Moses of Exodus 33, show me.

There's a relationship of trust that's building here. The Moses of Exodus 3 doesn't trust God. God, the God who has stayed out of the picture, the God who has allowed this oppression to happen, a God that from Moses' perspective has done nothing and said nothing.

Why would I trust that God? And now there's the Moses of Exodus 33 who trusts, who believes, and it says, I want to know more. And so Yahweh says, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, Yahweh, in your presence.

[28 : 25] I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I have compassion. We skip ahead to chapter 34. Verse 2, Yahweh says, be ready in the morning and come to Mount Sinai.

Present yourself to me on top of the mountain. So Moses chisels out these stone tablets, and then verse 5, Yahweh came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, Yahweh.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousand and forgiving, wickedness, rebellion, and sin, yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.

So again, look at this description in Exodus 34. God declares his name and God's name is what? Merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, faithful, steadfast, forgiving.

this is the God that reveals the divine self to Moses. And then, by virtue of this thing we called Scripture, reveals it to all of us.

[29 : 54] So what do we do with moments of divine revelation? These moments in Scripture, these moments in our lives and experiences, when we find God in creation, when we find God in a really good meal, when we find God in conversation with a friend, or in a church service with music and preaching and communion, how do we respond?

There's this article, and again, I've shared this with many of you here, that I've loved and cherished for years, and it's called If Your God Is Not God, Fire Him.

And I've, this is bad public speaking because I'm just going to read this to you, but it's so good, and I want you to pay attention.

Dale Ryan writes, there is a difference, sometimes an enormous difference, between the God of our doctrinal statements and God we live with every day.

Our theological convictions may be thoroughly orthodox, but we actually serve a God who is quick to anger and slow to forgive, or a God who shames his followers, or a God who is punitive and rejecting.

[31 : 08] So let me be clear about this. The God who is quick to anger and slow to forgive is not a distorted image of God. It's the opposite of God. It's the wrong God.

It's not God at all. It's not that I was looking in the right direction, but I couldn't quite see clearly. I was looking in the wrong direction entirely. It was the wrong God, and there, of course, is a pantheon of not-gods.

Take your pick. The angry, abusive God, the abandoning God, the inattentive God, the impotent God, the shaming God. There are many others. I no longer believe that such gods are merely distorted images of the living and true God.

They may be distorted images of abusive parents, or distorted images of other people who have hurt us, but they're not distorted images of God at all. They're not God.

And this conclusion makes a huge difference. If these gods are merely distortions of the true God, then maybe what we should try to do is undistort them. Maybe we can rework them somehow, negotiate with them, restructure them, reframe them.

[32 : 22] This is not, however, the approach suggested by Scripture. What we ought to do when we find that we serve a God who is not God, there's only one answer in the Bible. Throw them out.

Get rid of them. It is an idolatrous attachment, and it can't be reformed or restructured or rehabilitated or restored. And this is not a point where it's appropriate to be moderate.

We need to clean house. The God who gives us nothing but fear or shame is not God. Fire him. But what about the baby with the bathwater?

Friends, there's no baby. If we live in a relationship with a God who gives nothing but fear and shame, there is no baby in that bathwater.

We need to throw it all out. But what about all my good theology? Do I have to throw that out too? Well, not necessarily, but you may need to give it a rest. We need to take the time to clean house.

[33 : 25] We need to find out why we have tolerated an abuse of God for so long. We probably need to get back to spiritual kindergarten. We may have missed or forgotten the basics.

And so I need to go back to the most basic of spiritual truths. there is a God and it's not me. And all of my abusive gods were internalizations of my experiences with mortals.

If as children we experience abuse, we may learn that all powerful people are abusive, even God. So what is most familiar to us is a God who abuses.

And we may find ourselves attached to what we are most familiar with. But like all not-gods, these abusive gods are part of me.

They're an internalization of my abusive experiences. They are gods of my own creation crafted out of my experiences with other people. And recovery can only begin when I fire these non-gods and find a God who's not of my own workmanship.

[34 : 30] It takes a good deal of humility to return to spiritual kindergarten. But my experience has been that anything more complicated is best saved for later. We've had some practical experience in relationship with a God who is graceful and loving.

But what will God think about all of this? If we've served abusive gods, we will, of course, expect to be punished. We will perhaps be firing the only God we've ever known.

And the result will be, in all probability, a season of spiritual brokenness. A season, perhaps, of doubts and second thoughts and spiritual confusion and spiritual loneliness.

After all, those non-gods did provide us with some benefits. They were familiar. They were what we knew. And sometimes the familiar, even if abusive, is less terrifying than the fears that will come when we fire the only God we have ever known.

What will happen now? With a spiritual loneliness, and brokenness ever come to an end? How will God respond? What is God's attitude towards this painful spiritual poverty?

[35 : 43] The gods we craft from fear and shame and rejection will treat us with shame and they will blame and they will intimidate.

And we need to keep looking until we find the God who says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. There is a God we might want to get to know better.

I won't pretend that cleaning house of idolatrous attachments is easy. It isn't. It takes time and we will not be able to do it alone. We'll need help.

The not gods may return to disrupt our lives. We may need to throw them out more than once. We may need to return many times to the most basic of spiritual truths.

But the living and true God will see our spiritual brokenness and never shame us. Amen.

[36 : 42] So, I talked about all of those nine dollar words. What might a classic authentic faith look like?

And I have some suggestions. Number one, God created the world out of abundant love and entered into it to make it their dwelling place with creation.

Number two, two, God has never been against us. God has never been unable to be close to us. God has no desire to punish us.

Those were human ideas that we needed to be saved from. So, to show us this, Jesus, God in the flesh, came to fully reveal what God is truly like and to relaunch creation by confronting the powers of death and injustice through his life death and resurrection.

Therefore, the central goal of life is to discover and to creatively collaborate. It's not deterministic. It's not one thing that we got to figure out. It's to creatively collaborate in God's already present work of renewal, confronting and dismantling injustice and creating beauty.

[38 : 04] Now, to those who are pursuing injustice, to those who are setting up systems of oppression, that may feel like punishment and confrontation, but it is the work of a divine doctor who is bringing about cosmic healing.

We are invited not just to be nice to each other, but to confront those evil powers wherever necessary. number four, joyful reconciliation with God awaits all creation, and I believe people deserve to be told about this and begin that reconciliation process today.

You might even call that evangelism. This is my faith, and this is the faith that has been passed on to me, and it's the faith that I have had to work and struggle and wrestle to find in a world that wants to hand off to us many, many, many misconceptions and distortions about God.

And so may we together as a community, as individuals, as friends, as family, may we never be satisfied with a God who either abandons us or shames us, with a God who just tells us to be nice, or a God who says to stay out of it.

May we never be satisfied with a God who will use their power to shame and abuse you. May we press onward to be saved from our bad ideas about that.