**The Firm Foundation**

Matthew 7:21-29

In January of 2018 this home in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, partially collapsed.



Erosion was blamed but the picture is pretty clear - if you build a house on sand, it’s generally considered a bad idea.

If that sounds like something Jesus talked about, you’re right. In fact, we just heard these verses from Matthew 7.

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.” Matthew 7:26 [add text to slide w/ pic]

Just as a house built on sand will eventually collapse, so a life that is not built on obedience to the teachings of Jesus will collapse.

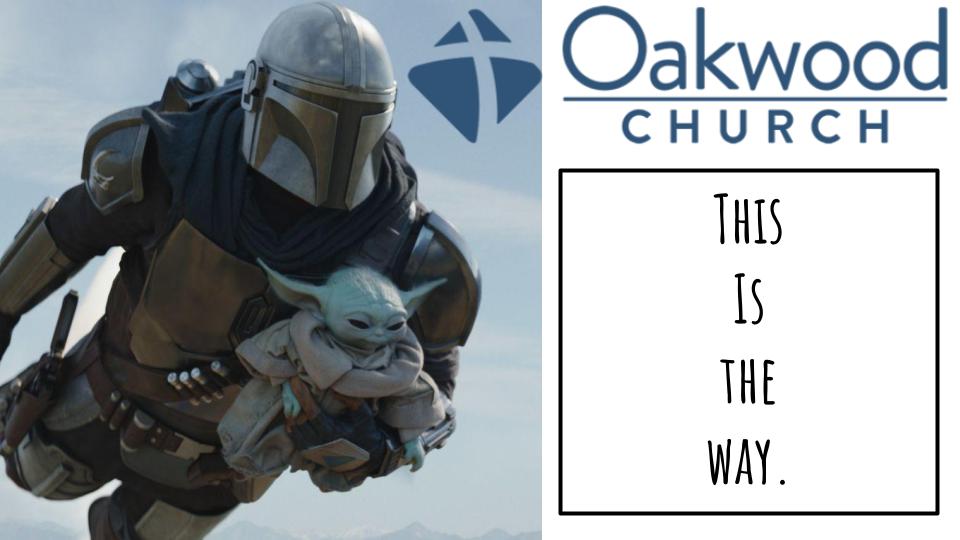
***There is only one sure and reliable foundation for life and eternity.***

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Matthew 7:24

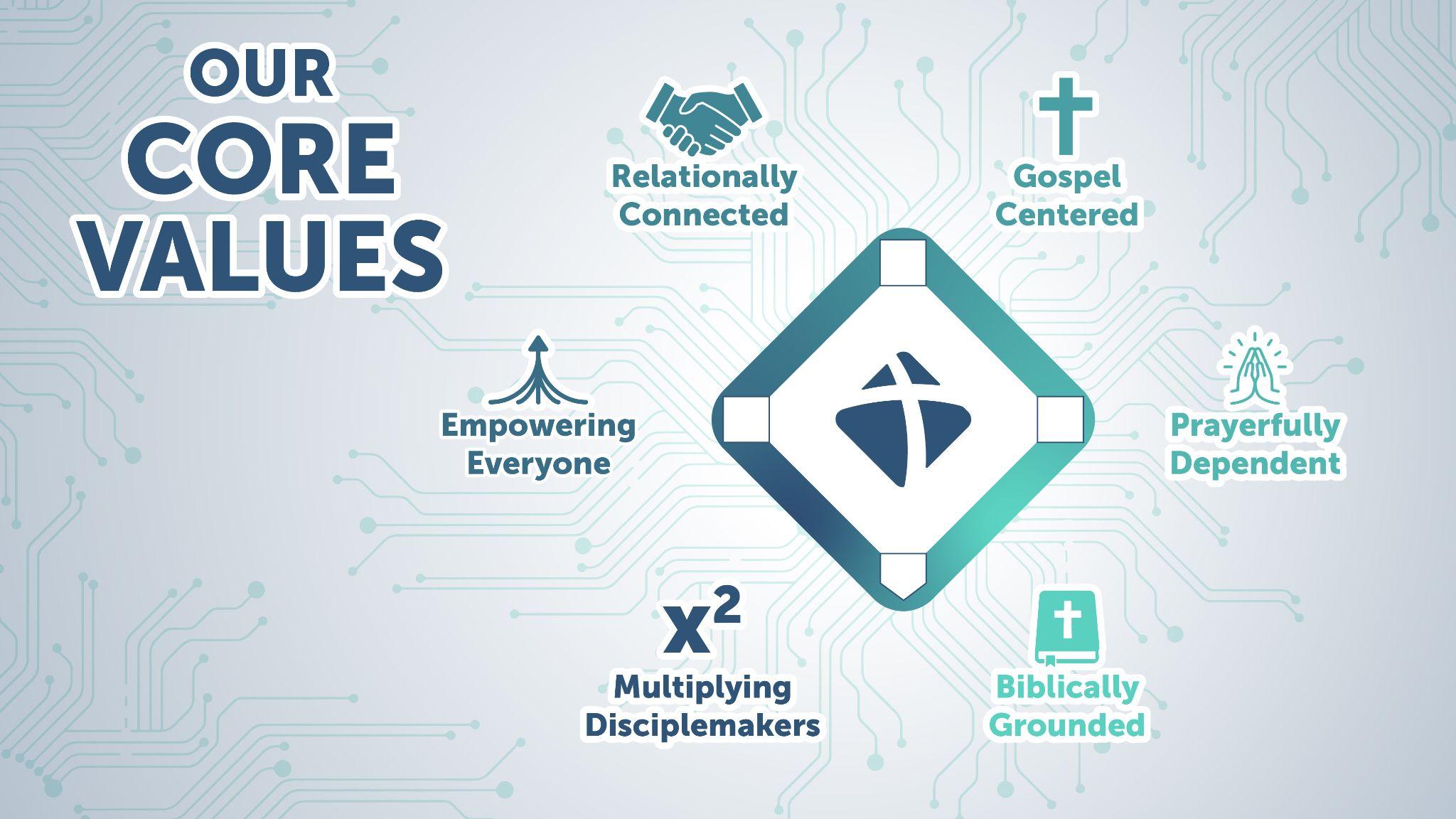
It’s very simple: 1) Hear God’s Word and 2) Obey God’s Word.

We are starting a new sermon series on our **Core Values** as a church. We have six core values that describe **HOW** we go about making disciples. The baseball diamond is our pathway that guides the process of how we train and equip followers of Jesus. That is our strategy. The core values are about our culture. As we make disciples who love God, grow in Christ, serve the church and reach the world, what is the MANNER IN WHICH we do so? The baseball diamond is WHAT we do. Our Core Values describe HOW we do it.

This is the graphic I wanted for the series.



For a number of reasons you can imagine we went a different direction. But I stand by the fact that ***the Mandalorian code of honor*** is the same kind of thing - it defines the core values of their tribe, which is what we are doing here at Oakwood for the next six months. What is the Oakwood Way? Join us as we walk through our six core values. Here is the actual graphic.



If you follow the counter-clockwise path of a baseball player, we will **start with Scripture**. The foundation for life and ministry is God’s Word. Everything we do is grounded in the truth, authority and power of God’s Word. That is why we are starting with Matthew 7 and we will spend two more weeks on the inspiration, inerrancy, power and sufficiency of Scripture to change us and transform others. If you’ve been around Oakwood for any length of time you can quickly see that we value the Bible. Our worship services are built around Scripture. Our Community Groups gather to study and apply God’s Word. Our meetings start with a devotional from the Bible. Our strategy as a church comes from the Bible and is focused on proclaiming and teaching God’s Word.

Everything we do is firmly grounded in the Bible, and we seek to do everything **saturated with prayer**. We know that true life change is something only God can do - so our mission is to join God in HIS work of transforming people and communities through the gospel of Jesus Christ. As you can see, our third value is **the Gospel** itself - keeping the main thing the main thing. This is why the cross is at the center of our logo and our baseball diamond - because preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus is the hope of the world and the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. It is not our wise and persuasive words. It is not our slick and professional worship and presentation. It is the words of the gospel itself that have the power to awaken a soul and change a life.

As you round second base by growing in Christ, our fourth value is **relationships**. We prioritize connecting people in loving, authentic relationships. All of our ministries strive to be relational - even the ones that are about getting work done - as we patch the many potholes on campus and as we pull weeds and small trees from our gutters we do it TOGETHER.

And the last two move us around third base (serve the church) to home plate (reach the world) as we seek to **empower** all believers and **multiply** both disciples and disciplemakers.

***This is the Oakwood Way.*** We will spend a few weeks on each of these six core values, digging into the key Scripture passages that address each one. For example, we will spend six weeks on prayer, using the six phrases of the Lord’s prayer. And we will spend six weeks on the gospel, going through Romans 8. It’s going to be a fun spring!

Now, join me back in Matthew chapter 7.

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Matthew 7:24

* **Hear** God’s Word
* **Obey** God’s Word

Here is **the only firm foundation for life and eternity**: ***to hear God’s Word and obey it.*** Are you like the wise man who built his house on the rock or like the foolish man who built his house on sand? This challenges all of us because it’s not just hearing and KNOWING God’s Word that makes you secure. It is hearing and OBEYING God’s Word as revealed by Jesus. Let’s look at these two essential layers to a firm foundation. First, hear God’s Word.

**Hear** God’s Word:

1. In the **Teachings** of Jesus

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man…” Matthew 7:24

Who is the wise man? **The first requirement** for a life of wisdom and security is to HEAR the words of Jesus. No other teaching can save you. The wisdom of Aristotle, the sonnets of Shakespeare, the politics of Marx, the philosophy of Kant, the religion of Mohammed… There are plenty of teachings out there - but none of that can give you a firm foundation, none of that can save you. There is only one set of teachings that has the power to save - the teachings of Jesus. ***“These words of MINE.”***

Some people have ***tried to paint Jesus as this inclusive religious teacher*** who represents the truth of all religions - Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim - all of them. But look just at this one verse - Matthew 5:24. There is **only one way** to be a wise man. And it is not to hear the Hindu Vedas or the teachings of Siddartha. It is not to follow the 5-fold path of Islam or even to commit yourself to the details of following the Jewish Law. The ONLY WAY is to hear the words of Jesus and obey them.

This is a clear, unqualified claim to being **the EXCLUSIVE SOURCE OF TRUTH** and the ONLY ONE who can offer salvation. Turn back just two chapters to Matthew 5.

**Hear** God’s Word:

1. In the **Teachings** of Jesus

“You have heard that it was said… but I say to you…” Matthew 5:21,27,31 etc.

**Six times** in Matthew 5 Jesus quotes a major teaching from the Old Testament and then announces His new spin on that teaching. At the end of this sermon the people all marvel at his authority because this was not at all how the scribes and teachers of the law taught. They all appealed to the Talmud - the collected teachings and traditions of Rabbis past and present. Jesus did none of that. ***He appealed to HIMSELF.*** “You have heard it said… ***but I SAY TO YOU***.”

**Jesus Himself IS the Word of God.** If you listen to Him, you listen to God. If you reject Him, you reject God. If you ignore Him, you ignore God. How has God spoken to the world? For the first few thousand years, God spoke through prophets. Then God spoke through His Son. The Word of God was made flesh and came to dwell among us.

It is so essential that we be clear on this point. ***God has not spoken a general message*** to the world saying, “I love you all as my children. I accept everyone without condition. Don’t worry about any coming judgment or punishment. I am the Father of all people and you can believe whatever you want and do whatever you want. Picture Santa Claus and you’ll have the idea.”

That is not how God has ever made Himself known - but you would think it was based on how LOTS of people imagine God today. But that’s all that is - someone’s creative imagination. You might as well say, ***“I think God is like the Mandalorian.”*** In some ways, I’d argue, that’s closer than the Santa Claus - all accepting universal Father idea.

From when God first walked with Adam and Eve to when He called Abraham and spoke to Moses, ***He has been very clear and explicit*** about what He expected and even demanded. And all of that revelation in the Old Testament led definitively to the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. And when Jesus started teaching, listen to what He said:

**Hear** God’s Word in the **Teachings** of Jesus

* The **Fulfillment** of the Old Testament

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

That is one of the clearest and most important sentences Jesus ever spoke. He did not come to get rid of the Old Testament. **Jesus came to FULFILL it** - to complete it. That’s a beautiful double meaning. He came first of all to be the first and only person to live in perfect compliance with the Law of God. So Jesus fulfilled the Law ***by obeying it,*** including the heart-set and intentions behind His obedience. But it also means Jesus came ***to fulfill the saving mission of God*** that everything in the Old Testament was pointing toward - the Law, the sacrifices, the calling of the prophets, the symbols in the tabernacle and the temple. All of it - every jot and squiggly line in the Hebrew Bible - pointed to Jesus. He is the fulfillment of everything God was doing.

What did that look like? Jesus spelled it out in **the Greatest Commandment**.

* The **Fulfillment** of the Old Testament:
* To Love God **Wholeheartedly**
* To Love others **Sacrificially**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart…” Matt. 22:37

Jesus summarized the entire **Law of God** - the entire will of God - in two clear and simple commands: ***love God and love your neighbor***. He put a zinger on both of those by saying love God with ALL you are and love your neighbor AS YOURSELF. So in case anyone tried to say, “Yeah, sure. Got it.” They would hear the whole command and be like, “Hold up. That seems to be asking a lot of me.”

Indeed it is. ***It is asking EVERYTHING of you.*** If you listen to Jesus’ teachings you quickly get the message that it’s ALL OR NOTHING. You can’t love God and love money. Once you find the kingdom of God, you have to trade everything you have to get it - like a precious pearl or a perfect field. The call to follow Jesus is not to add him to your already good life so it’s a little better. The call to follow Jesus is to come and die - to take up your cross and follow Him on the way to the Calvary where your old life will die and He will bring you to life again as a new creation.

To really hear God’s Word so you can build your life on that firm foundation - the only firm foundation - you must hear God’s Word in the teachings of Jesus and specifically in the GOSPEL of Jesus.

**2. Hear** God’s Word in the **Gospel** of Jesus

What God demands (**Perfection**) Jesus offers as a **Gift**

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

This is ***the only way to be saved*** - this is the only firm foundation for this life and for eternity - to hear God’s Word so you can believe it and obey it. At the center of God’s revelation is the DEMAND of God and the OFFER of God.

Matthew 5 makes it clear that **what God demands is serious**. Remember, six times in Matthew 5 Jesus said, “You’ve heard it said, but I say to you.” He did not abolish the Law of Moses; He fulfilled it, He completed it, He expanded it to clarify the intention behind each law.

* It’s not enough not to ***murder***, you have to control your anger and the words you say.
* It’s not enough to avoid committing ***adultery***, you have to control your desires and thoughts.
* It’s not enough to insist on the ***letter of the law*** - “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” - but rather to know that the law is about LOVE - so turn the other cheek, go the extra mile.
* Don’t just love your ***neighbor*** - love your ENEMY.

God not only demands obedience to His Law, He demands ***obedience from the heart*** - sincere love and devotion that moves you to obedience. In short, it’s simple - what God demands is **PERFECTION**. Internally pure motives and thoughts that produce externally righteous and loving words and actions. Every time. Without fail. There you have it.

If that’s all we had, we would all immediately know we were doomed. “Be perfect,” is not good news. That is terribly bad news. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is that ***God has offered us as a GIFT*** the perfection that He demands.

* What God demands (**Perfection**) Jesus offers as a **Gift**

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

***No one can be perfect apart from a miracle of God.*** God has to change you - He has to transform you - which is what the Bible calls being “Born again.” You can’t “Become the righteousness of God” just by trying harder. A few verses before this one it says, “If anyone is IN CHRIST he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come.” That’s the key phrase: **IN CHRIST**.

Jesus is the only one who ever fulfilled the righteous requirements of God’s Law, so He is the only one who has righteousness to offer. But when you call on Jesus to save you, you are UNITED WITH HIM. At the moment you put your faith in Jesus He lifts you out of your sin and places you into His own righteousness. The picture for me is of a person **drowning in the boggy SWAMP** of their own sin - you call on Jesus and He lifts you out and places you into His Coast Guard Rescue Ship. You move from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ.

The believer is IN CHRIST - defined by Jesus since you are united with Jesus. In Christ you are ***immediately DECLARED RIGHTEOUS*** and in that same moment you begin to BECOME RIGHTEOUS because the Holy Spirit moves into your new heart and begins the process of sanctification. Jesus became sin so we could become righteous.

What God demands - perfection - Jesus offers as a free gift. This is the amazing grace of the gospel!

And the first essential step to security now and forever is to ***HEAR THIS GOOD NEWS***. People cannot put their faith in Jesus, the only Savior, unless they hear this message! “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.” The free gift of salvation is available but your friends and family and neighbors and co-workers will not be able to receive that gift if you don’t share it with them!

And there are **unreached people groups** out there who have NEVER heard about Jesus - it is out task to complete the great commission by bringing the gospel where it has not yet been heard. People cannot be saved - they cannot attain the perfection God demands without receiving the gift that only Jesus can give them. They MUST HEAR about Jesus to be saved.

That is the first essential step - the HEAR God’ Word. But the second follows immediately after - to OBEY God’s Word.

**Obey** God’s Word:

1. **Renounce** your sin

“Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Matthew 4:17

Jesus picked up on the message John the Baptist had been preaching - calling people to deep and sincere repentance. **To repent is to turn back** - to make a 180 degree turn. Repentance is recognizing that you have been going the wrong direction and that you have to turn all the way around in order to go God’s direction. This mean’s RENOUNCING your sin and your old life. It is about making a clean and decisive break with your sin.

I love asking people to ***tell me their story***. Where did you grow up? Were you raised going to church or with any spiritual belief? When did you first hear about Jesus and come to believe in him?

A common theme I’ve heard from Americans who have been in church most of their lives is this line: ***“I’ve known Jesus my whole life.”*** Now, in some cases that is mostly true - like for my wife who was raised to know and love and trust in and follow Jesus and never strayed from the straight and narrow path more than a centimeter or two.

But the rest of us, if we’re honest, know that there was a time or two or 200 that we ran away from home like the prodigal son. **A friend of mine in Chicago, Don**, was raised Catholic and his daughter started coming to our youth group and pretty soon she and her Mom made a new commitment to the Lord Jesus. But Don was a few steps beind them. He was coming to church - a big step for a Catholic, to come to a protestant church. But he wasn’t really understanding what was happening.

As I got to know him and asked him to share his story, he used that line, “Oh, I’ve always known Jesus. I’ve always believed in Jesus.” When I hear that, alarm bells start going off for me. I remember sitting with Don in Panera (yes, they have those in Chicago too) and drawing a line down the middle of a sheet of paper saying, “Listen, Don, you have to look at your life as a **BEFORE AND AFTER** - you need to see that your life was one way before Jesus and is different now after committing to Jesus.” But he couldn’t point to a time that he had made a decisive break with his past sins and a clear commitment to the Lord Jesus.

So I gave him homework. I had him read Tim Keller’s **PRODIGAL GOD** - which is a fantastic book for religious minded people who are more like the older brother than the prodigal son - they’ve been pretty good people, they haven’t done terrible things. That was Don - a good husband, a loving and engaged father, a tax-paying churchgoer.

I’ll never forget what he said, around halfway through the book - ***“This book is messing with me, Darin.”*** “Yes, Don,” I said, “That’s the whole point.” Don and his wife went through one of my Gospel of Mark Bible studies and at some point in the middle of that study and reading Prodgial God, the light finally turned on for Don and he realized that he had to turn away from all of his sins - even his own self-reliance and his pride in his own good works.

That is what Keller brings out in that book - ***“some people are more lost in their goodness than sinners are in their badness.”*** Usually immoral, godless people know they are lost. But religious, “good people” don’t reallize how truly sinful they are and how deeply they do need a Savior.

In order to obey Jesus and follow Jesus, you have to hear God’s Word - you have to hear the call of Jesus - and the first thing Jesus calls people to do is to REPENT - to renounce their sins. Some people are like the prodigal son - with obvious sins to reject. Others are more like the older brother in that parable - and their sins are less obvious, at least to them. But those sins still keep them from the perfection God demands - the sins of pride, superiority, judgment and resentment of others. Those sins are just as deadly as sexual immorality and greed and debauchery. And in many ways those sins are more dangerous because the proud, superior, “righteous” person usually cannot see them.

In order to obey God’s Word in Christ, you must renounce your sin and second:

**Obey** God’s Word:

1. **Surrender** completely to Jesus

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me’... Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Matt. 4:19-20

***A lot of people heard the teachings of Jesus***, but only a few obeyed them. Thousands, tens of thousands of people in the land of Israel saw Jesus do miracles - like feeding the 5,000 - and listened to his creative, authoritative and engaging teaching. But after his crucifixion only 120 devoted followers remained together and committed to Him. 120.

Jesus said that most people would choose the broad road that leads to destruction and only a few would find the narrow path that leads to life. Jesus intentionally made his teachings difficult as a filter for the crowds. He explicitly told people to ***“count the cost”*** of following Him and not casually say, “Sure, Jesus, I’ll follow you.” He said you have to hate your family - to be so devoted to him that your allegiance to mom and dad, brother and sister was like nothing to you. That would be hard to hear today, but nearly impossible in that ancient Jewish context.

Jesus saw into the hearts of people and called them to let go of the thing they were serving.

* For a ***wealthy young man***, Jesus said, “Give it all away. Your riches are destroying your soul.”
* For a ***woman caught in adultery*** Jesus said, “Go and sin no more.” Leave that life of immorality, renounce it - and come follow me.
* For those ***possessed by demons*** Jesus set them free and ordered them to live a new life in allegiance to him, not satan.
* For the ***religious leaders*** like the Pharisees, Jesus called them to renounce their self-glorifying, public posturing.
* For a ***tax collector*** Jesus said, “Leave that job behind and come, follow me.”

A few people made this commitment to Jesus - but only a few - because it had to be a total commitment. There was no halfway - **no partial surrender.** What Jesus required was total surrender.  
  
And that’s how it works in war. ***When you lose in battle*** to a stronger army, you don’t walk up to the general of that army and try to negotiate comfortable terms. You lay down your weapons and throw yourself at the mercy of the one against whom you have just been at war.

Many people think of God as this Santa Claus type figure who winks at their sin and just says, “Come on up here into my lap so I can hug ya.” But they don’t realize that God is the Almighty King and their whole lives **they have been at WAR with that king**.

When people ***worship other gods*** - trusting, loving, serving things like money, sex, power, glory - they are robbing God of the worship only He deserves.

When people ***refuse to listen to God’s Word***, when they ignore God or overtly reject the truth they have heard about Him, that is a direct affront against the God who spoke that word to them.

When people ***break God’s Law*** - whether something written like in the 10 commandments or just the moral law that is imprinted on every human heart - they are poaching in God’s kingdom - they are violating His sovereign rule. God has said, “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.” Every time you harm your neighbor, disrespect your husband or wife, fail to lovingly serve - you violate God’s Law and set yourself up as a rebeal against His kingdom.

***People are at WAR with God*** - yet they think he will just shrug that off and say, “Don’t worry about it - come on up into heaven with me! It’s all good!” But God can only welcome someone into His kingdom if they have been RECONCILED TO HIM. Not if they remain at war with Him. Listen to Romans 5.

**Obey** God’s Word:

1. **Surrender** completely to Jesus

“While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” Rom. 5:10

Reconciliation with God is possible for those who put their faith in Jesus - who died to pay the price for our sin. But apart from that saving work ***people are not at peace with God, they are at war with Him*** - they remain ENEMIES of God, deserving His just wrath.

A lot of times when we call people to believe in Jesus we present it as “asking Jesus into their hearts” or “asking Jesus to come into their lives.” This is often appropriate with small children. But with teens and older adults in can be unhelpful if it ignores or downplays the need for repentance and total commitment.

To be saved from the coming wrath of God ***you can’t just “ask Jesus to come in” to some little corner of your life*** where you can control and direct Him. Jesus won’t “come in” on those terms. He will come in when you ask Him, but only if you **invite Him in as LORD**. ***He will not come into your life on any other terms.***

And for Jesus to become your Lord, you must renounce and turn away from all other masters, all other allegiances, and pledge yourself completely to Him.

https://aleteia.org/2019/04/26/how-was-baptism-practiced-in-the-early-church/#

In the early church, around the 2nd century, **a baptism tradition** developed where new believers were ***baptized right at dawn***. They would start facing west, into the darkness. They would say, “I renounce Satan and all his works,” and spit into the darkness. Then they would strip off their outer clothes and go into the water - ideally cold, moving water - where they would commit themselves completely to Jesus and be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then they would come up out of the water, facing the first rays of the rising sun, and be dressed in a new white robe.

Obedience to Jesus begins with repentance and faith. This means a clear and permanent break with your past sin and your old life, and a decisive personal commitment to Jesus as your Savior and Lord - your new master, and the owner of your life.

That commitment then requires a new lifestyle, or it wasn’t really a commitment!

**Obey** God’s Word:

1. **Align** your lifestyle with Jesus’ commands

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:19

***Jesus didn’t say, “Follow me and I will teach you many interesting things.”*** He said, “Follow me and I will change your life. I will make you something new.” Those first disciples were fishermen - their lives were built around catching fish. Jesus changed their lives completely, saying, “Your job is now to pursue people as you sought after fish.”

Peter, Andrew, James and John - four of the most prominent apostles. As they followed Jesus he changed them. For ***Peter this meant a great humbling*** - learning to depend on Jesus and not follow his own ideas. Remember when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying he had to be crucified and Jesus said, “Get behind me satan!” ? Remember when Peter denied three times thtat he even knew Jesus? Peter was impulsive and type A. Jesus used that - but had to harness it - had to train it.

***James and John*** were called “Sons of thunder.” At one point they wanted to call down fire from heaven on a town that did not receive the gospel. James would later become an early martyr. John would become Jesus’ closest friend, laying on Jesus’ chest at the last supper, and promising to care for Jesus’ mother after his death. What a gentling! What a change!

***If Jesus is not changing you - it means you don’t really belong to Him.***

**To follow Jesus, by definition, is to CHANGE** - to become more and more like Jesus - more an more committed to His purposes and ways.

As we saw earlier, this means loving God. It means loving other people. It means fighting the sins that once controlled you. It means serving God not yourself. It means investing your time, talent and treasure in God’s kingdom work.

***Are you a FISHER OF MEN?*** Is it your life’s mission to pursue people with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you pray for and seek opportunities every day to share the good news that the perfection God demands He offers in Jesus? Look again at Matthew 7:24.

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Matthew 7:24

* **Hear** God’s Word
* **Obey** God’s Word

***Who is the wise man living on the firm foundation?*** Is it the man who hears the worsd of Jesus and UNDERSTANDS them? The man who hears and BELIEVES THEM? No. It is the man who hears and DOES them.

***Are you the wise or foolish builder?*** We love to think of ourselves as secure in Christ. But true security - true assurance - comes from a lifestyle of increasing OBEDIENCE to the commands of Jesus. This is not a works-based salvation. Our good works don’t save us - but they are the evidence that we are saved.

Meet with a Christian friend this week and talk through our **Key Questions for Huddles**, that we’ve printed up for you today. How are you loving God? How are you growing in Christ, serving the church and reaching the world? It’s a new year. God’s Word commands us to orient our lives around the teachings of Jesus. Be a wise builder this year. Hear God’s Word and OBEY IT.

Let’s pray.