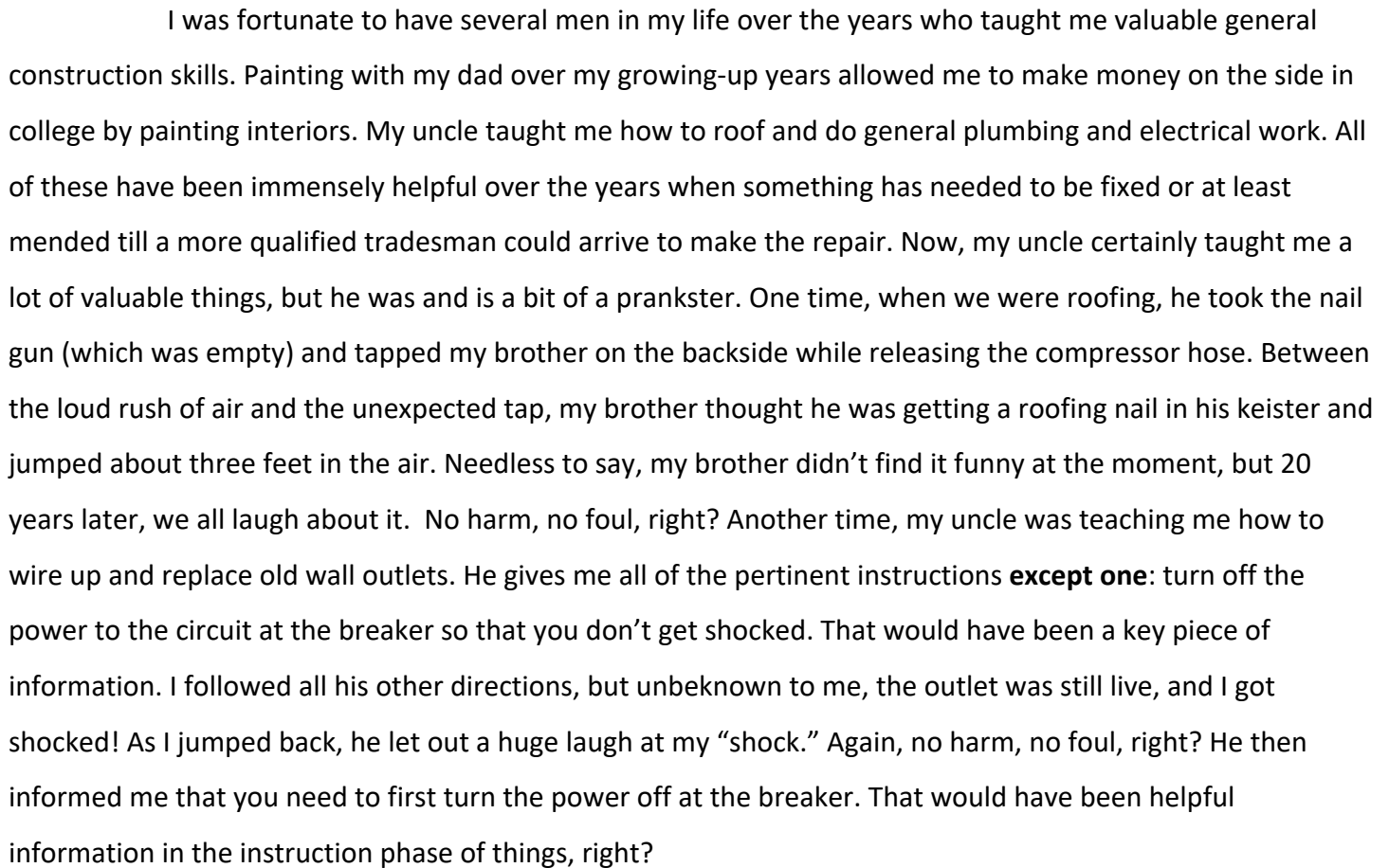


(Expanded Sermon Notes)



I tell you this story because, too often, we treat God like my uncle, a prankster that is having some sort of cosmic fun at our expense because he willfully neglected to tell us the pertinent information ahead of time. And with that, we really chide at the doctrine of eternal destiny. In horror, we ask, how could a loving God condemn anyone to eternity apart from him in a state of punishment? This question is not bad or wrong, but it begins with a false premise that God willfully neglected to tell humanity all the needed info to begin with and that he has made the means of salvation known or possible. Yes, the doctrine of eternal destiny is serious and one that makes us sit up a little straighter. And we are going to consider some words from Jesus that will, again, do the same for us. The reality of both this doctrine and the words of Jesus are a reminder that God is a God of grace and desires all people to experience true freedom and abundant life.

“We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.”

1. True Freedom

- a. What we think freedom is: Unregulated autonomy to do what we want.
 - i. This is why we have such a difficult relationship with any kind of divine accountability.
 - ii. A God of freedom doesn't demand, he offers.
 - iii. A God of freedom doesn't coerce, he illuminates.
 - 1. Adam and Eve were well informed ahead of the consequences of the fall.
 - 2. God did not force them, love without a choice is not love at all. So for God to be loving, he had to allow a choice. But, he does not leave them uninformed ahead of time. If he would have left them uninformed about the tree and the consequences of it, he would be cruel.
 - a. In many ways, God is simply allowing them the demands of their perceived freedom.
 - iv. What would it mean though if God could not judge the world and hold evil accountable?
 - 1. Second, the judgment of God is necessary for the existence of a real moral order in the universe. It provides the ultimate sanction which underlies all moral demands, without which lawbreakers would go unpunished. In an age of moral relativism, the judgment of God provides the absolute objective standard to which all other moral judgments must conform. Further, the judgment of God is necessary if divine goodness is to be victorious over evil. Because God will judge the world, his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven; justice will prevail; and the good will be seen to be good, finally and fully. Judgment brings glory to God by displaying his holy nature. God will judge the world, and that reality gives meaning to all that we do in this life. It provides an assurance that no good will go unrewarded (cf. Matt. 10:42) and no evil will be left unpunished (cf. Matt. 12:36), and it gives us the hope that righteousness will rule in the kingdom of God (2 Pet. 3:13).¹
- b. **What true freedom is: Obedience to God's will.**
 - i. **True freedom is living in your greatest purpose. And your greatest purpose is to glorify God.** Too often we conclude that freedom is doing whatever I want even if it is destructive to myself or to those that I love. And while that is an element of freedom, we can all agree that isn't healthy or without appropriate consequences.
 - ii. **Examples:**
 - 1. **Work / Career:** If I continually do whatever I want in the workplace, I am going to burn bridges, harm relationships, and likely hurt my career. So often in our

¹ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 308). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

places of work, it isn't just about what we accomplish, it is also about how we accomplish it. You can hit the sales targets for the month, but if you do that by stealing commissions from other co-workers, it is going to have consequences. When we understand that there are boundaries and social EQ that need applied in our workplaces, we are able to experience a greater purpose of work than just earning money. That is work, our vocations, are all a holy calling from the Lord and an opportunity to display kingdom values to a non-believing and seeking world.

2. **Marriage:** If I just do whatever I want in my marriage (think heart, attitude, actions) my marriage will not flourish. I might be able to say that I have exercised my right or ability for freedom, but what I've really done is left a wake of damage. When I understand that there are certain boundaries that healthy marriages need, I am able to walk in and experience the greatest purpose of marriage, that is two people mutually serving Christ and one another in this age.

c. **We need to pay attention to Jesus' words here... "loses and saves."**

i. **Let's note these two words that are peated by circling them.**

1. In one case the picture here is offered that if we want to save our lives through our own logic, we will actually lose them. However, if we lose our lives (for Christ's and the gospel's sake) we will actually save them.

- a. This is logic that was counter to their cultural moment, and it continues to be counter to our cultural moment.

- b. **For them:** In a shame / honor context of the first century, the most important thing you could do with your life was to bring honor on your family. That means that anything that would not bring honor on your family should be avoided at all costs. And the bold claims of Christ could definitely bring "shame" on your family, particularly in a Jewish context.

- i. **Consider the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:17-27)**— He had accumulated great wealth and had done with religious fervor. Jesus' invite to him is that same as it is here in chapter 8, "lose your life to save it." This distressed the rich young ruler because he had great value in his wealth. Why? Because it was a point of honor for him and his family and to get rid of it all would have brought shame on them.

- ii. **Consider the disciples after the crucifixion (Jn. 20:19-29)** — John tells us that they were hiding for fear of the Jewish leaders. Why? Because their Messiah was seemingly dead and, they knew that they could be next and that they would definitely need to return home in a cloud of shame.

- c. **For us:** In our cultural moment, we in the West think less from a shame / honor perspective, and much more from a individual rights and identity perspective. We are deeply shaped by the idea, "I think therefore, I am." So Jesus' logic hits us in a different, but still counter way to our own "natural" logic. That is restraining anything that is perceived to "limit" my individual freedom is a morally wrong thing. In order to "save" ourselves in this cultural moment, we are to indulge ourselves. **But Jesus says the exact opposite to us. He says, to save yourself, you need to understand that indulging is not what you were created for, and while living outside of your created purpose, might feel like freedom, it is actually bondage.**

- ii. We have come to the turning point in the Gospel of Mark. The next section (**8:22–10:52**), which follows Jesus and his disciples as they journey to Jerusalem, begins and ends with the healing of a blind man. These bookends are about physical blindness, **but the stories in between are about spiritual blindness. This journey to Jerusalem is actually a struggle for sight.** The story of the blind man in **8:22–26** is only found in the Gospel of Mark. One detail stands out right away that troubles many people. Why did it take Jesus two attempts to heal this blindness? After spitting on his eyes and laying his hands on the blind man, Jesus asked him if he could see anything, and the man said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking” (**v 24**). He saw but only partially. Then Jesus went to heal him a second time, and this time “he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly” (**v 25**). **Did Jesus make a mistake or do something wrong the first time? No! The answer is quite simple: this healing is a parable, an object lesson. This blind man represents the disciples. They have partial spiritual sight, but also partial spiritual blindness.**²
- iii. **Verses 27–30** prove that **the disciples do indeed partially see who Jesus is.** Others are giving all the wrong answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets (**v 28**). But Peter gets it right! “You are the Christ” (**v 29**). It seems that Peter has just answered Jesus’ question from within the boat. *Do you get it yet, disciples? Can you see who I am yet?* (**v 17**). Peter answers, *Yes, we see clearly. You are the Christ.* Jesus commands them to tell no one about him (**v 30**). He does so because they don’t really understand yet. They are still partially blind. The next verses make this crystal clear.³

2. Abundant Life

- a. So if Jesus’ words here are about seeing him and ultimately seeing ourselves clearly, how are we to understand the implications of that clear sight?
 - i. Remember – One of the things that we often say about the Bible is that it has two primary functions for you and me:
 - 1. **A lens to see God clearly through.**
 - a. That is, we believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word and reveals not just his plan for salvation, but himself so that we can know him.
 - 2. **A mirror for us to see ourselves more clearly.**
 - a. That is, as we grow to understand the nature and character of God as revealed in the Scriptures, we also understand ourselves. This comes through passages that describe the human condition, characters that we can relate to, and through the commands of God that reveal how we are to live.
 - ii. **Jesus’ ultimate aim is for us to have clear sight to see that he offers abundant life.**
 - 1. **Jn. 10:7-12 – ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

² Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 119.

³ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 119–120.

2. **Jn. 3:16-18** – ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
 3. **Ps. 16:11** – You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
 4. **Isa. 48:17 – 19** – ¹⁷ Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. ¹⁸ Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; ¹⁹ your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.”
- iii. **Contrary to the opinion of some, the gospel is not simply a self-help strategy for finding peace and happiness in this life.** The Bible presents the gospel as a matter of eternal significance. In fact, it is a matter of heaven and hell, for our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:36; 5:24; 8:24).⁴
- b. What we think a fulfilled life is: Following my desires.**
- i. The question is what is going to make me whole and complete?
 - ii. What is going to lead to my greatest flourishing?
 1. **The reference to the crowd is sudden and unexpected (cf. Ch. 7:15; 8:1), but serves a vital function in the narrative. By calling the crowd Jesus indicates that the conditions for following him are relevant for all believers, and not for the disciples alone.** This had important implications for the Christians in Rome and elsewhere. It indicated that the stringent demand for self-renunciation and cross-bearing extends not only to Church leaders but to all who confess that Jesus is the Messiah. **It was the Lord’s intention that those who follow him should not be detached observers of his passion, but people who grow in faith and understanding through participation in his sufferings.** Only in following on the way to the cross is it possible to understand either the necessity of Jesus’ humiliation or Jesus himself.⁵
- c. What a truly fulfilled life is: Living out the desires and purposes of the one who created me.**
- i. Remember, it is the artist that gets to define the artwork. The painting has no ability on its own to define itself or give meaning to its existence.
 1. **This is the process of renouncing the idol of self.**
 - a. Jesus stipulated that those who wish to follow him must be prepared to shift the center of gravity in their lives from a concern for self to reckless abandon to the will of God. The central thought in self-denial is a disowning of any claim that may be urged by the self, a sustained willingness to say ‘No’ to oneself in order to be able to say ‘Yes’ to God. This involves a radical denunciation of all self-idolatry and of every

⁴ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 303). Free Church Publications. Kindle Edition.

⁵ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 306.

attempt to establish one's own life in accordance with the dictates of the self.⁶

- ii. Disordered desires in my relationship with God. → I.e. The displacement of God. → Idolatry – This is the displacement of God.
 - 1. **What is an idol? – An idol is something that we look to for things that only God can give.**⁷
 - 2. **“We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life.” – Tim Keller**⁸
 - 3. At the center of idolatry is the centering of self... “I am the greatest authority on my condition and redemption.” → This is of course, a lie that is at the heart of what John (in the book of Revelation) is talking about and at the center of the draw of the excesses of Babylon.
 - a. It is also what Jesus is pointing out here in Mark 8.
 - 4. **The question we need to ask ourselves:**
 - a. **What good thing am I looking to for lasting satisfaction and inadvertently creating an idol?**
 - 5. **Paul gives us a very clear picture of the abundant life in Christ in Gal. 5:22-24.**
 - a. **²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
 - i. **Do you hear that concluding statement? → “Crucified the flesh and its passions.” → We are to live differently in Christ.**
- iii. You, me, and our neighbors are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). We do not cease to bear those things in our rebellion.
 - 1. With that, we are given two visions for life one defined by our own desires which can feel like freedom and abundance but is actually bondage. Or, one that is defined by God and enables us to live in our created purpose which is true freedom and abundance... now and through eternity.
 - 2. Which life will we choose? → And, what idols am I raising up in my life that run counter to the abundant life promised by Jesus?

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 307.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), 131.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2011), xix.

Additional Notes:

Excursus: Christ

The Greek word “Christ” translates the Heb. “Messiah,” meaning “to anoint.” In the OT, three classes of people received anointing: prophets, priests, and kings. The third class, kings, influenced the development of the concept of the Messiah in Judaism (e.g., 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2). Especially as the monarchy failed and eventually fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., an expectation grew in Israel that God would raise up a new and even greater king like David. “ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land’ ” (Jer 23:5). The OT does not use “the Messiah” in an absolute sense, nor does it develop or present a formal doctrine of the Messiah. This also remains generally true for the subsequent intertestamental period, when the concept of Messiah is less frequent and developed than is often supposed. The earliest known instance of the absolute use of the term “the Messiah” comes from Qumran (1QS^a 2:12). The most common conception of the Messiah in pre-Christian texts is as an eschatological king. Otherwise, the messianic hope remained fairly general. Through the Messiah, God would establish and protect an everlasting kingdom over all the earth. The Messiah would be the perfect king chosen by God from eternity, through whom God would first deliver Israel from its enemies and then cause Israel to live in peace and tranquillity thereafter (*Sib. Or.* 3:286–94). It may also be noted that neither the Servant of Yahweh nor Son of Man concept in the OT is associated with messianic connotations.⁹

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 249–250.