

# Mark Week 5

## Identity Markers

March 22, 2026



I'm going to start off with something a little bit different than I normally do.

This is a song that probably in my early 20s—might have been even, it could have been late teens—but early 20s somewhere in there, I remember hearing, and it marked me.

And the song is by an artist called Wayne Watson.

And Wayne, in this song, is struggling with what it means to be a Christian getting involved in other people's lives, and sort of thinking about what it means to be a follower of Jesus and how sometimes we look at people and go, "I'm not going to touch them. They're dirty or they're unclean," or, "I'm going to stay away from their sin," or whatever else.

And he's struggling with what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

And I know the lyrics to this song really marked my life, and I think it's a great setup for what we're going to read in Mark today.

So here's the lyrics by Wayne Watson of a song called *Untouched by Human Hands*:

*The Plague—Generation's leprosy  
Unspeakable shame--Untouchable lives  
Much in need of love  
But these days who's got much to give  
Give in to the pressure  
Cross the street on the other side*

*When Jesus told the listening  
That those who follow Him  
Could bear the strike of the serpent  
Could drink the poison in  
Was His vision some spectacular scene  
Some exhibition-Some display  
Or a reminder, as I live and breathe  
To reach out and not be afraid*

*I try to be a Godly man  
I try to walk in the steps of Jesus  
I disregard the Lord's command  
When I walk through my journey  
Untouched by human hands*

*I despise your evil way—Have no part in such things  
From such obvious violation I keep my hands clean*





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*But inside this heart of mine oh, there dwells little good  
Only the flow of calvary—Only the Lord and His blood*

*God bless the child and lest I forget  
God save the dying ones who must live with regret  
Out on the street—Out there where no one can see  
Oh Lord, Stretch forth Your hand and reach them through me*

*I try to be a Godly man  
I try to walk in the steps of Jesus  
I disregard the Lord's command  
When I walk through my journey  
Untouched by human hands*

And see, we're called to be those people. We're called to be followers of Jesus that reach out to the people on the margins and those that are hurting. And sometimes we Christians can develop this sort of antagonistic view towards sinners or towards certain groups of people, and what we become is we become very unlike Jesus.

And so as we enter into Mark chapter 2—because we finished chapter 1—we're going to see, and sometimes you have to be shown this, you might not see it if you're just reading Mark alone or through a devotion. But what we're getting ready to do is we're getting ready to enter into a section that runs from chapter 2, verse 1 through chapter 3, verse 6. It's a subunit within the 16 chapters of Mark.

And they're conflict stories, and there's five of them. And you wouldn't probably lump them together and see them if someone didn't show you. But the conflict stories that start in 2:1 that run through 3:6—one of them deals with forgiveness of sins, and there's a conflict. There's a conflict with eating with sinners. There's a conflict about fasting. There's a conflict about Sabbath—eating and plucking grain on the Sabbath—and then there's a Sabbath healing. And there's conflict.

And what's interesting is this section ends early on in the gospel, but it's sort of shocking, because these are the people that go to synagogue regularly. These are the people that read Scripture, probably knew the Old Testament better than any of us—the religious leaders. I mean, they memorized it. They knew it very well. They prayed at all the prayer times. These are the people that really should be following God.

But yet, when Jesus comes on the scene and there's conflict, look at how this section ends in **Mark 3:6: "The Pharisees went out and**

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**immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”**

Isn't that shocking? That people who read Scripture, that prayed, that were the religious leaders—when the very person that the Scriptures talked about walked in front of them—they wanted to kill Him. That should be sobering for all of us, because if we're religious people, we have to ask the question—and it's a tough question for all of us to ask: Is it possible that I could be going to church... Is it possible that I could be praying... Is it possible that I could be reading Scripture and thinking I'm in—and I'm actually on the outside? That I would be one that would not want to have anything to do with Jesus if He showed up, because of the way He acted and the things that He did and the way that He touched people?

Because if we're reading Scripture right, we have to do that. That's why, as a general rule, you don't see a lot of churches preaching through the Gospels. And the reason they don't is because it's tough. It's tough to listen to what Jesus has to say, because He's speaking to you and me. He's speaking to the religious people.

And His toughest, most biting words are to us. They're not to those on the outside—He's gracious to them. “Oh, you were caught in adultery? I forgive you. Now go and sin no more.” But to the religious leaders: “Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites. You travel land and sea to make one a proselyte, and when they're converted, you make them twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

You go, “Man, that's rough.” Yeah—that's **Matthew 23:15**, if you want to go look it up so you can read it again and see how tough it is again.

And the reality is that these stories are there to speak to us, because Mark's asking all of us: Do we really know who Jesus is? Or have we created Jesus in our own image—or God in our own image—or whatever else? These conflict stories are dealing with something. They're primarily about Jesus challenging their identity markers, which is what He does for all of us.

What's an identity marker? Identity markers are anything we rely on to quickly decide who's in and who's out, who's one of us and who isn't, usually without even realizing that we're doing it. We all have it. Every single person has identity markers. They could be right. They could be wrong. They could also be weaponized. There are all kinds of things, but we all have them.

I mean, right now—we're in the NCAA championship basketball. You know everybody's watching that. If you're a Christian, you're watching Kentucky today at 2:45. But I'm just kidding—that's just a joke. But the point is, you know that if you went into a

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stadium with your jersey on, you'd want to sit next to the people who've got the same jerseys. You don't even think about it—you just sort of do it. We all have these identity markers that help us understand.

And you see in America—the American church has got them, plentiful. You see it all the time on Facebook: “Well, they're not a Christian because they did this.”  
“They're not...”

Because we're delineating who's in and who's out. Well, Jesus is coming on the scene, and He's messing this thing up left and right. And maybe—just maybe—He might mess you and me up. And maybe we have to look in the mirror.

See, the identity markers for the Jewish people, if we go back in that world—the big three—and there were more—but the big three were: Sabbath. Do you keep the Sabbath? Do you not keep the Sabbath? That was an identity marker. Still is today in some denominations of Christianity. If you don't do Sabbath on the day they do it, you're not a Christian—even though Paul says in **Romans 14** that you can choose whatever day you want to celebrate the Lord. But who cares what Paul has to say, right? Just do whatever you want to do. Anyway—so, the Sabbath.

Table fellowship—who you ate and drank with. Who'd you hang out with? They had a real strict policy: we're not hanging out with those people. Get around them—they're sinners.

They had a strong ethnicity. If you're not Jewish, you're Gentile—you're outside. And they even had that in the temple. The Gentiles could only go so far.

But these identity markers formed boundaries. And these boundaries were there that really pushed away outsiders. And these boundaries led to excluding others. And that exclusion created a sense of superiority—they were better than. That often led to little or no compassion for those on the outside.

You see that in Luke 18 when the Pharisee goes to pray: “I'm not like this guy”—because he's better. And you go, “Wow—that's the first century, Chip, but man, that's a lot like the American church today.” You bet. You bet.

And the Gospels are saying to you and me: it's possible that we could be Pharisees on the outside, thinking that we love God, that we show up to church, we read Scripture—but we're not doing it the way Jesus said it should be done. We've created our own systems.

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And so Jesus comes in, and He starts tearing these things apart. And guess what they want to do? They want to kill Him. They want to get rid of Him.

So He comes on the scene, and all of a sudden, what it means to be the people of God is now mediated through Jesus. It's not mediated through Sabbath. It's not mediated through table fellowship. It's not mediated through whether or not you're a Jew or a Gentile. It's mediated through whether or not you've accepted Christ.

God's people are not identified by separation, but by response to Jesus. And so what happened is—yeah, praise God that that's not the case—that we're not identified by separation. Because I'm going to tell you right now, if we are identified by how well we do it, none of us are getting in.

And so what He's challenging here is this system, because the religious leaders of the day had created a system that excluded the very people that God cares about. Jesus confronts this head-on, exposing how easily devotion can become a tool for division, and insists that mercy, restoration, and human need—not boundary-keeping—are the true signs of belonging to God.

And we need to pay attention to these stories. There's five of them, and we're going to look at them over the next several weeks. And they're important that we see what Mark is doing, because what we don't want to do is not realize that we're the ones actually out to get Jesus—and we think we're on the inside.

And so last week, we left Jesus out in desolate places because the leper who had been healed didn't do what Jesus asked him to do. And so His fame started spreading. He couldn't go into the towns and cities, so He's out in the desolate places. And we're going to pick up in chapter 2, verse 1, from where we left off.

We're told: **When He returned to Capernaum...** and the key thing here is **...after some days**—probably had been out in the desolate place for a while, and gradually those crowds had wound down, and so He felt like, “I can sort of head back now into Capernaum.”

But He goes there after some days, and... **it was reported**—they saw Him—and people went all through the town saying, “He's back. He's here.” Because He was at home. Now, we don't know exactly what home this is, but probably it's Simon Peter's home, which we've been in before already in the Gospel of Mark. So He's come back into Capernaum—probably into Simon Peter's house.

So He's there, and we're told: **And many were gathered together...** because they had heard that He was in town. So

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they come, and they fill up this house. And these houses weren't big, so it wasn't like there were thousands of people—but it was jammed. The house was jammed so that there was no more room. There was no room—not even at the door. It was so packed that even with the door open, people standing, you couldn't even get in and look through the door and see.

And remember, the doors are really important in the Gospel of Mark. We mentioned that last weekend—sometimes they're access to Jesus, sometimes people are keeping people from Jesus, sometimes you're on the outside away from Jesus. But look at what's going on inside the house. This is very, very, very important.

**He was preaching the word to them.** He wasn't healing anybody—nothing wrong with that. He wasn't casting out demons—nothing wrong with that. But what He was doing is His mission. His mission was to proclaim the gospel. His mission was to proclaim the reign of God. So He's there teaching them about this.

And no matter how many times you read this passage, no matter how many times you study this passage, this is a really crazy passage. Because what happens is we're told this group came, and they were bringing to Him a paralytic—a guy who couldn't move—carried by four men.

Now, I'm going to mention this to you. You can go back and study this and look at it for yourself. I don't have time to develop this because it's not the main point of what I want to develop. But Mark, in a literary stroke—and when I say literary stroke, I mean the way he's penned it—wants us to see something here, and it's important that we see it. He wants us to see that he's chosen to say that there were four men, which means they were at each corner of the deal.

This guy's immobilized. He can't move. So he looks dead. It looks like these are pallbearers carrying him—this person who looks dead, who's being carried by these four men. He's painting a picture here. They're going to go up, and they're going to dig into the dirt and mud of the roof. They're going to lower him down. This is all funeral imagery.

And what's going to happen is when this person is lowered down—emblematically carried, lowered down into the grave—who's there? Jesus, saying, "Rise." Which is a beautiful passage to use at a funeral for a believer, because you don't go to the grave—you meet Jesus and you rise. Okay? And so the layers here are just beautiful.

And so they brought this paralytic, carried by four men. And when they couldn't get near Him because of the crowd—and it's because of the crowd, and the crowd in Mark usually is keeping

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people from Jesus. They're there to listen, but they're not there to obey.

So the crowd's there. They removed—actually, they dug is the better word—they dug. They removed the roof, but they dug through the roof is what they did, which means they probably removed whatever tiles, and then there was mud and thatch.

No matter how you preach this message, no matter how you read this message, this is spectacular, because there's no way to not sit there and realize that people were in the house—in a crowded house all together—and all of a sudden dirt and debris starts falling on everybody. And you can imagine the scene. It is what it is. And that's what's going on.

And so they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening—obviously large enough to get a grown man through—they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

And then we're told that **Jesus saw their faith**. He saw the faith of the men that had brought this person. It spoke to Him.

**And He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."** Now, the text doesn't say this, but there's no commentary that's ever been written—there's no way you can read anything other than this: Why did they bring the paralytic to Jesus? Because they wanted him to be healed. There's no question. Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." There's no question that the guys up on the roof who have lowered him down are like, "Yeah... that's not why we did all this work, man. I mean, we came for a reason."

Which is interesting, because—and we'll talk about this a little later—sometimes what we think people need is not exactly what they really need. And this is important that we see this, because they've brought him—and there's nothing wrong. Don't get me—don't think that I think these people are wrong for wanting to bring the paralytic to Jesus to be healed. It's not like they've got bad motives or anything. They're good people. They're wanting to see this guy healed.

But there's more that needs to be going on. And the very fact now that Jesus addresses the real need sets up the conflict.

Because we're told: **...some of the scribes were sitting there**—plural. The scribes are there to evaluate what's going on, because they have their identity markers. They know who's in and they know who's out, and they're trying to figure out—is Jesus in or is Jesus out? That's why they're there.

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Often times as a pastor, people will come up to me and say, “Pastor Chip, what do you think about this issue?” And my response—general rule—so if you ever ask me, just know this is what you’re going to get from me. I’m helping you out in advance. My answer is going to be: Are you asking me that question because you want to know if I’m on your team, or are you asking me that question because you want education and to learn about those issues so that you can understand them better? Typically, it’s the first one, not the second one. They’re just trying to figure out, does he believe the way I believe on this issue so I can figure out if I want to stay here or go somewhere else, you know, type thing.

Well, they’re there because they want to see if He’s in or out.

“I knew He was a heretic.”

Anyway—some of the scribes were sitting there. I’ve been called worse. I am from Kentucky.

So anyway, some of the scribes were sitting there, and they were questioning in their hearts.

And what Mark wants you to see here—they weren’t verbalizing anything. They weren’t whispering to themselves. This is all going on inside of them. But I want to take a moment here, because they’re questioning in their hearts. We know that what they’re questioning is leading them wrong.

I just want to take a moment here—has nothing to do with the sermon—I just feel like I need to say this as a pastor. One of the most common things you hear in America today, especially with some preaching, but self-help and all this stuff, is: “Follow your heart.”

Let me tell you as your pastor—don’t follow your heart. Okay? That’s not Biblical. What Scripture says is that we should guard our heart, because our heart can be incredibly deceptive. But if we put the Word of God into our heart, then we won’t sin against God.

**“Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”** Guard your heart. Don’t follow it. Make sense?

So anyway, they’re sitting there, they’re questioning. And then what Mark does—it’s beautiful—he gives us what’s going on in their heads. And every one of these lines means the same thing, but it just gives you some perspective of what they were thinking in their hearts: **“Why does He speak like that?”**

“Why does He say that?”

“We’re in Capernaum—we’re not in Jerusalem.”

“We’re not at the temple.”

“We’re not where sin is forgiven—in the temple—by God who

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lives in the Holy of Holies.”

“Why is He saying such a thing?”

“Why would He speak like that?”

**“He’s blaspheming.”**

**“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** That’s the issue. They’re not wrong on the fact that they believe that who can forgive sins but God alone. They’re right on that issue, but they’re so right on that issue, they miss God. And this is all there for you and me to wrestle with. Could we be so right that we’re wrong?

They go, “Who does this guy think he is—God?” Mark’s writing to you and me so that we can ask the question, who is this guy?

And Mark, because he’s so gracious, gives us a little hint here. He says, immediately—there’s our word again—Jesus, perceiving in His spirit. He’s able to read their minds. He’s not just a man. He perceives what they’re thinking, that they question within themselves.

And then He said to them, **“Why do you question these things in your hearts?”** Wouldn’t you think all of them would have gone, “Dude, He just read our minds”? No. They can’t get past their identity markers. At all.

And so He says to them: **Which is easier?** The Pharisees used this when they would teach. “Which is easier, this or that? Which is...” So He uses their phrase.

**“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’”**

Which one’s easier? Easier just to say these words or to heal this person? Well, to them, they’re going, “Well, it would be easier probably to say the words than to heal the person.”

You and me should know something, though, because Mark’s wanting us to see this. It’s actually harder to say, **“Your sins are forgiven,”** because this guy’s going to go to the cross to pay for those sins to be forgiven.

And just so that you know, the same guy who has all of his limbs immobilized—Jesus will have all of His limbs immobilized so He can heal this man.

He says, **“Which is easier?”**

He says, **“But that you may know...”**

He’s giving them information. He’s telling them what they need to know. They don’t want to hear it, though.



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He says, **“That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”**

This is what He said to the paralytic. But He uses a phrase here for the first time, and He uses it a lot in the Gospel of Mark, and it’s one we’ll come back to at a later time. He uses the phrase, **“the Son of Man.”**

Well, if you were a religious leader, you knew what that was. When He stands before the high priest and He says **“the Son of Man,”** the high priest rends his robe. We’ll see this later on in Mark when we get there.

Who’s the Son of Man? Because if you don’t understand who the Son of Man is, it doesn’t make any sense.

Well, the Son of Man comes from Daniel. It comes from **Daniel 7:13–14**. I’m just going to read it briefly. I’m not going to make a ton of commentary on it. We’ll talk about this later when we get to other passages where we really need to understand this.

But this is what Daniel says: **“I saw in the night visions...”** This is a vision. Key thing—this is a vision. Underscore that.

So in a vision, **“behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man...”** This is where Jesus is getting this from.

So the Son of Man—what’s He doing? Well, He’s on the clouds of heaven. Where’s He going?

Well, **“he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.”** This is really important that you all see this here. When Jesus talks about the Son of Man coming on the clouds, He is not coming from heaven to earth in this passage. He’s on the clouds, being presented, going to the Ancient of Days—the Father. This is a vindication motif, and it’s a vision.

And what’s happening is this Son of Man who’s being vindicated is given dominion, glory, kingdom... **“...all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”**

This is the framework for who the Messiah is. This is the one that will conquer all, the one that will reign over all. So when He says He’s the Son of Man, they’re like, “Well, this guy’s crazy.”

So He says, so that you can know that the Son of Man—He doesn’t use the word Christ, because everybody had an idea of what Christ was. When He would say Son of Man, like Daniel, what’s He saying? He used that so that He didn’t use words that they

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would have necessarily associated with certain things. He's throwing them for a loop. But they know who the Son of Man is.

He says, **"Rise, get up and pick up your bed."** This is what's so great here. If you and me were paralyzed and we were healed of our paralysis, so now we can move again, it would take months of rehab to get those muscles working again to where we could walk or pick up anything. Not with Jesus. When He heals you, it is complete, utter—no rehab. Go past rehab. Don't even collect 200 bucks. "Pick up your bed and go home."

**And he rose—and our word again—immediately. He picked up his bed, went out before them all. They were all amazed and glorified God.**

You can be amazed and glorify God and not be a believer. They don't repent. They don't follow Jesus.

They say, **"We never saw anything like this before."** Wow. But they didn't believe.

So, what can we learn from this? I mean, there's so many things I could say. I could talk about faith that would bust through a roof to bring somebody to Jesus. I could talk about the power of community—their faith that made a difference. I could talk about Jesus being fully—I mean, there's so many things I could talk about, fully God. But I'm only going to do two. And I'm doing two here because I want you to really think here. I'm trying to be a really good pastor to get us to think about some things.

The first thing is that **we often settle for visible fixes while ignoring deeper realities.**

And we see that here. They brought the paralytic, carried by four men. They thought that the fix needed to be him healed. That's the fix—Jesus, heal him. But the reality is, he needed to be forgiven. That's what he really needed.

And so I want us to think about some things in our own lives. Think about things where maybe we settle for the quick fix or the visible fix rather than what we really need.

So I've got two reflection things to think about. How about when we're praying for relief while avoiding repentance? We do this.

What we'll do is we want the feeling removed rather than the transformation that needs to happen in our lives. And it's so easy that we do this. You hear people all the time, "Oh Lord, just deliver me." It's like, no, no—you don't need to be delivered from the fact that you're in debt. You need to learn how to spend, man. You need to learn how to manage something. You need to learn how to do... And it's like so often we just want the symptom to be gone. We don't want to deal with the real reality.

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Or maybe saying it this way—how about we want God to fix our relationships without owning our sin or without owning our part? See that all the time. “That’s their fault.”

Well, you don’t think you have anything to do with anything? “Not at all.”

Man, how many people does it take to dance? Two. “I know, but it’s their fault.” No, it’s not. And what it is—do we want healing, or do we just want to be right? Because sometimes we’ve got to...

So here’s what I would say: Take a moment. Allow God to search your heart, because sometimes we just want the quick fix rather than the real deep meaning transformation.

Here’s the question: Where are we asking Jesus to fix our circumstances while quietly avoiding what is really broken underneath?

I think that’s something that we can wrestle with and chew on with this text, because they bring the guy thinking he needs to be healed, but the reality is there’s something deeper.

And oftentimes in our lives as Christians, we’re just looking for the quick circumstantial fix rather than doing the hard work that it takes to really bring transformation.

And nobody’s responding, but I will tell you—that is better preaching than you all are letting on. You may not like it. I get it. May not like it. Yeah, I’m sure I’ll hear about it. So anyway—but it’s all good. I’ve got thick skin.

The second thing—and this is really important. This is my heart. I’m not trying to be difficult to anybody. I just believe the church can do a better job. I believe that we Christians can do a better job. And so here’s the second point that I see in this passage, and it runs through all these stories: **We often create access barriers to Jesus, and sometimes we don’t even realize it.**

We’re the crowd outside keeping people out. We’re the religious leaders that can’t figure out what’s going on, and we’ll tell people, “Don’t listen to this person. No good.” But we’re blinded because of certain things. It happens.

Here’s the truth: Identity markers are boundaries we erect that, if we aren’t careful, will create lines that Jesus spent His ministry crossing. And this is really something we should think about. We often do this.

So let me ask you a couple of questions. These are good questions. Would someone on the outside find it hard to come to Jesus because of us? How about at work? Who do you run down? What groups do you run down? What things do you say at work that might be off-putting? What’s on the back of your car—on your bumper sticker? Could it

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possibly exclude somebody? Could it possibly make somebody go, “I don’t want to go there”?

I mean, I’ll be honest with you—I have to pray about it—but sometimes I’m in traffic, and I see the Grace Community Church bumper sticker, which I’m glad to see on the back of the car... and then I see another bumper sticker and go, “Oh no.” Whoever gets behind this car is going to assume that this church believes this. And whether we might or might not believe that, there’s about 50% of the people that don’t believe that. And so what you’ve done is you’ve just excluded people from ever walking in here because you had to make a point rather than realizing we’re called to make a difference.

And let me put it another way: What does someone have to look like, believe, or agree with before we’re fully comfortable welcoming them? These are great questions. “Well, if they don’t do this and this...” It happens all across America. People walk into church, and people in the church go... and they walk out and they go, “That was the Holy Spirit. We’re so holy—we ran them out.” Hey, if it was the Holy Spirit, it was H-O-L-E-Y.

So let me say this. This is what I’ve found to be true, and maybe this will be meaningful to somebody. I’ve found that when I spend my time more worried about my faithfulness—“God, I want to be the person You’ve called me to be. God, I want to speak the words the way You want me to speak them. God, I want to be a light to people that are on the outside”—I find when I spend more time worried about my faithfulness, the better off I am.

Unfortunately, many Christians, especially in America, are more concerned about their behavior—what they’re doing. “We’ve got to get out and do this. We’ve got to take over that. We’ve got to do...” We’re so concerned about their behavior. What happens is we start to slide into being Pharisees, putting up access barriers to people. And it’s not a beautiful thing.

Are there areas in our lives where we care more about our identity markers than we do people? Because this matters.

And so I’m going to say something here that I know—I know, I know, I know—is probably going to get somebody mad at me. I don’t want to do that. That’s not my heart. But I’m also going to be a pastor, and I’m going to tell it like it is, because you just have to.

Here’s the reality: We are really not good in the American church—just not good—at understanding how two things work together. And it’s love and truth. We really struggle with this bad. So let me try to explain this the best way that I can so that we’re all on the same page.

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First of all, love's not mere approval. Love doesn't just say, "Do whatever you want to do, be whatever you want to be," you know, all of that. Love's not just mere approval. You don't just tell kids—if all they're eating is chocolate chip cookies—"Oh, I love you so much, just keep eating chocolate chip cookies." Your pediatrician would say to you, "You don't love them." I mean, you wouldn't say to a three-year-old, "Yeah man, here's five packs of cigarettes, man—smoke them all today." We did that in Kentucky—but...

But we go, "That's not good for them." So love's not just mere approval. I think we've sort of lost that in society. Truth matters, and Scripture calls certain things sin. These are non-negotiables. There's no way around it.

But can I tell you something? These areas, Biblically, are for you and me to talk about, because it says to speak the truth in love—to who? It's in the church. It's not to the outsiders. It's here. That's why Jesus' toughest stuff is to the religious people, not to the people on the outside. We've got it completely reversed in the American church. We think the church is supposed to be for us—activities, make us feel good—and the preacher preaches stuff that makes me feel good, and then blast everybody out there and tell everybody how bad they are so we can feel good.

That's not the way church is supposed to be. We're supposed to come in here, get our mail read so that we can get sanctified, so that we can be more like Jesus. So then we walk out there, people see the lives that we have, and they want what we have.

And so although this is true—and there's no question about it—we can end up defending the truth in a way that disconnects us from people. And that's what we don't want to do. And that's what sometimes we do. Because you hear people going, "I'm just standing up for the truth, man. That's what I'm doing. I'm just standing up for the truth." What that oftentimes means is: I don't need to examine my tone. I don't need to examine my posture. And I also don't need to examine if I'm in relationship with these people. I'm just going to blast them because I'm standing up for the truth.

That's not—that's Pharisaism. That's not biblical, following-Jesus stuff. Biblical truth should be delivered from within relationship, not from a distance of moral safety. We so often just want to blast everything, get on Facebook, and act like we've just done God a service—when all we've done is irritate 50% of the people that we said something to, and we walk away going, "Man, I did something." You didn't do anything. You know when you do something? Get involved in people's lives.

Like instead of asking, "Are we willing to speak up for the truth?"—this is what Christians should ask: Do we love this

## Mark Week 5

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person enough to move toward them, bear their weight, and stay in relationship even if it costs us? That's what Jesus did, and that's what we should do.

And so where are we more concerned about being right than genuinely seeing and loving people? Because that's what God is calling you and me to do. And what we don't want to do is spend our entire life thinking that we're so in—by pushing everybody away with our identity markers and all these things, the access barriers that we do that make us feel superior—only to find out in the very end we actually weren't in, we were actually out.

And the very people that we were ripping against and whatever—we find out that they ended up being in. Because Jesus said to the religious leaders, “The tax collectors and the sinners enter the kingdom of God before you do.”

It should be an awakening for us to say: “God, examine my heart. I want to be the person You want me to be. I want You to sanctify me. I want You to get me right. I want You to really help me understand what it means to be a follower of You. Let me not be so concerned about everybody else—let me be concerned about me so that I can be the person You've called me to be, so that people can see the good works that You're doing in me as I let my light shine, so that they will glorify my Father who is in heaven.”

Father, I humbly pray we see the truth of Your Word. I pray, God, that we realize that we can get so off-centered and so focused on so many other things and not on You. I pray, Lord, that You would keep us at the center of You—that You would be the center of everything that we do.

And Lord, as we sing this final song, I pray that Your Spirit would arrest us here—in the lighthouse room, in the lobby, and online. Lord, do a work in us. Help us to be the people that You have called us to be. Help us to be the lights that we need to be. We love You. We thank You. And we praise You in Jesus' name. And everybody said, “Amen.”

Would you stand with us? And let's worship the Lord together.

