CRAIG: Good morning.
TOGETHER: Good morning.
CRAIG: So kind of a big week this week, right? I feel a certain amount of pressure to say something but I really don’t know what to say. I feel like if I don’t say something, I’m probably gonna get some letters. Anything I say, I might get a letter from different groups of people. So let me see if I can generate the largest number of letters possible. I’m just gonna say, just honestly, I feel like the presidential election looks a lot like a Saturday Night Live skit at this point. And maybe not even a Saturday Night Live skit, more like a skit that one of the writers pitched to the producers and they rejected it because they said, “That is too outrageous.” And you may be in that same kind of place and there’s a certain amount of tension and stress as we contemplate the future of our country. What does it look like for me to vote properly? And how do I do that?

And so I wanna say a couple of things. First thing I wanna say is this: vote. Get out and vote. Even if you find yourself absolutely uncertain what to do about the presidential election, understand that there’s a lot of other offices that are being filled and in a lot of cases, the candidates are much clear cut as the people of God how we should be voting. And there are issues that, as people of God, I think it’s clear what we should be voting on. So please, don’t let your anxiety about the presidential election keep you from getting out and voting. Please go out and vote.

And the second thing is just this: vote your conscience. Vote your conscience. I know I’ll probably get some letters on that because it probably feels a little bit like a cop out. But it’s not a cop out. I’m your pastor and I care more about you than I do about this election. And I care that you be able to stand in front of God and say, “I voted my conscience. I voted what I thought was right. Given what I know… I don’t know all that I don’t know. I don’t know how all these things are gonna play out but given what I know and what I feel in my heart, this is what I did,” and God will be okay with that. Because here’s the thing: this is what the prophet Isaiah says. He says, “Don’t you know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded, God sits enthroned upon the circle of the earth?”

It’s never gonna be Trump. It’s never gonna be Clinton. God sits enthroned. Its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy. He spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to knot. He reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows in them and they wither. And the world wind sweeps them away like chaff. As much as you might be tied up in knots about this election, God is not. God is not on His throne going... He’s in control. Get out and vote. Vote your conscience.

Won’t you pray with me? God, we do pray for our country and we pray for the future of this nation of ours. We’re grateful that we have it, and we’re grateful of the freedoms that we possess in it. And there’s a fear that some of those freedoms might be taken away as we go forward. But quite honestly, there are lots of fears that surround every possible candidate in this thing. So, Lord, thank you that we have a God who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and that however this election turns out, nothing that really matters in terms of eternity is gonna change. So Lord, we ask that your will be done. It’s not always entirely clear what that will is, so Lord, would you speak to each and every one of us who have the right to vote and would you give us the clarity and the courage to vote with that conscience? Lord, be glorified, but most importantly, be in control. In Jesus’ name, amen.

All right, enough about the world, let’s talk about the word, shall we? We’re gonna talk this morning about another aspect of identity theft we haven’t hit on yet. And I think maybe the best way for me to start is I wanna tell you the saddest story of identity theft I’ve ever seen. A couple of years ago I was in South Dakota. I was working with some students at the Pine Ridge Native
American Reservation. And we were staying at this guy's place and we had a tent set up. And one morning I got up and I needed to go speak to the owner of the house, the owner of the land. He was one of the pastors in the area. So I went. I knocked on the door, and I heard a voice from somewhere in the house say, “Come on in.”

So I came in and I closed the door and then I turned around and in front of me was a wolf. And I'm not talking about a picture. This is not a wall calendar. A wolf. And I'm not talking about a husky, okay. I'm not talking about a wolf... This was a wolf, an honest to goodness wolf. And there was a part of me that thought, “Okay, is it like a stuffed wolf? It's a weird place for a stuffed wolf, right in the middle of the foyer? But maybe...” But then I was like, “Yeah, statues don't... They don't blink.” And he's not blinking much but every now and then there's a slow sort of blink. And I had two sort of equally significant and simultaneous thoughts. My first thought was, “I'm about to die.” And my second thought was, “But this is not a bad way to go.” I mean, if you think about it, you get to heaven and people ask you, “How'd you get here?” And you're like, “Wolf.” They're gonna be like, “Dude, wow. Mad respect, right?”

But I'm staring at this thing. It's this huge, clearly powerful wolf. And I'm thinking, “I'm gonna die.” But the moment sort of drew out. It was a long moment. He didn't move. I didn't move. And I began to have this really weird thought. And that weird thought was, “It doesn't really look like he wants to eat me. It kind of looks like he wants me to pet it.” And so, I don't know what happened, like something came over me and I was like, “Come here.” And then I was like, “Oh, my gosh. That was the stupidest thing. You just invited the wolf closer.” It was a huge mistake. But he came. He kind of padded up and his sort of head was down and sort of looking. And I was like, “What am I doing?” And his tail started wagging. And I was like, “I am petting a wolf. I am a beast master. This is unbelievable.”

And so I was having this moment where I'm petting this wolf. I'm like, “This is crazy.” And all of a sudden, coming from around the corner came this little rat muffin of a dog. I mean, it was not even half a bite for this wolf. It was like that big. And it came around and it stopped and it saw what was happening and it clearly had this look in his face like, “No. No, no, no.” And it like all went off. It started yipping and yapping and kind of like snapping at the wolf. And I was like, “I'm gonna see this thing get eaten. This is unbelievable.” But that's not what happened. The wolf actually went like... And like ran away. And this little thing sat down very pleased with itself and kind of like looked at me like, “That's what. Yeah.” And it was the saddest thing I've ever seen.

I mean, first off, the fact that the wolf had been domesticated. That was a little bit sad. And by the way, just so you know, you can't go get a wolf. Like if you're thinking, “I need a wolf,” you're out of luck. You're not allowed to have them but there's some exceptions made for Native Americans on Native American land. So he had a wolf. That's not normally allowed but he had domesticated the wolf and the thing is that somewhere in domesticating this wolf, it lost its identity. And it's not just that it's lost its identity, it lost its power. I mean, it would run in fear of this little yappy thing. There's no question who had the more power but somewhere in the loss of its identity, this wolf lost access to its power.

And I share that this morning because the same thing can happen to us as the church. If you have a Bible, I'd love to have you turn with me to the book of Ephesians. We're gonna be picking up in chapter two and if you don't have a Bible, please grab one of the ones on the seat in front of you and if you don't own a Bible, please consider that our gift to you. You'll find Ephesians towards the end of the Bible. Feel free to use the table of contents. It's a pretty small book. God has some really powerful things to say. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 11 begins this way. He says, “Therefore,” and anytime you see the word “therefore” you're supposed to ask, what is the “therefore”, there for?

And in that particular case, what he's saying is, listen, what I just said, because of what I just said, and last week, what we realized that was, was that God had transformed us. That we used to walk around. Our lives used to be characterized by line-crossing and mark missing by sin. But God, in His mercy, He saved us. And He brought us into a position where now our lives are characterized. We walk around in good deeds that our Father prepared in advance for us to do. Everything about our lives is
different and we have power. We used to be under the control of Satan but now we’re his worst nightmare if we hold on to our identity. So he says, “Therefore, remember that formerly, you who were Gentiles by birth and called the uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision,” which is done on the body by human hands.

Remember, that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners of the covenants of the promise, without hope, without God in the world. Last week, what Paul did was he described the way that we were so that we could understand the way that we are, so that we could understand the contrast. And he did that describing what was true of every human being, Jew or Gentile. But now he kind of focuses in, he does the same thing but he’s talking specifically about Gentiles and he wants to say this is what was true of you as Gentiles but it’s not now. And he identifies several things that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. And, by the way, if that word is unfamiliar, if the word Gentile is kind of a new term, basically in the ancient world, there were two categories of people. There was the Jews, the people of God that he’d called to himself, and then there was the Gentiles which was everybody else.

And God here begins to speak about the things that were distinctive about the Gentiles. And he says some things that were obvious and some things that were not as obvious but they were more important. When he talked about the Gentiles, first he talks about an obvious thing that distinguished them from the Jewish people and he talks about circumcision. Now, as soon as you mention the word circumcision, every guy in the room is like, “Can we talk about something else? How about anything else?” Because it’s incredibly uncomfortable. And if you don’t know why it’s an uncomfortable subject, well, then you clearly don’t know what circumcision is. And if you don’t know what circumcision is, Google it. I’m not gonna get that detailed today. And if you’re a kid and you’re like, “I would like to know what this is,” ask your parents. Parents, you’re welcome. It’s gonna be a great Sunday dinner conversation today.

But it’s interesting. The circumcision was a really obvious thing, but what Paul says is, it might be obvious but it really didn’t amount to much. In fact, you can hear and he’s kind of dismissal. He says, “It’s something that’s done in the body by human hands. It doesn’t really matter.” It might have been a major distinguishing feature of the Jews and the Gentiles but at the end of the day, it doesn’t count for anything really. But then he goes on to mention several things that are less obvious but they’re more significant. And he mentions five of them. He says that we are separate from Christ as Gentiles, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners of the covenants of promise, without hope and without God. Five things but really they boil down to the same thing. They all boil down to saying they were without hope.

See, separate from Christ, the word Christ is the Greek word that is used to translate the Hebrew term Messiah. And the Messiah was the word for “the promised savior.” See, the Jews were in the same place as the Gentiles. We saw that last week. We were all separated from a real relationship with God because of our line-crossing, our mark missing, because of our sin. But God said to the Jews, “I’m gonna send you a savior. I’m gonna send you somebody to save you from your sins. I’m gonna send you somebody to fix that.” The Jews knew that they had the savior coming. They had hope. But the Gentiles didn’t have any promise of a savior. They were in the same place, but they didn’t have the hope of a Christ, of a savior. He says that we were excluded from citizenship in Israel. We weren’t part of the nation of Israel and the nation of Israel was a nation that God had poured blessings upon and with those blessing had given them promises of even greater promise and blessing to come. They had hope.

So they were foreigners to the covenants of promise. A covenant just means agreement, and God had entered into several agreements with the Jewish people and each one of those agreements had a promise attached to it. That He was going to do something for them. The Gentiles, he says, they were without God. They didn’t know who God was. They didn’t know what God was like. So the Jews, at least, knew that God was gracious and is merciful. So although they were separated from him by sin, they knew that God wouldn’t leave them there because they knew enough about him to know that he was good. The Gentiles didn’t know that. They were without God, without knowledge of him. In other words, across the board, the Gentiles didn’t have hope.

The Jews were in the same place but the Jews had hope that they wouldn’t be left in that place. The Gentiles didn’t have that.
Now, here’s the thing, when God called the Jews to himself and he gave them this hope, he expected they would do something with it. God gave the Jews hope because he wanted them to announce that hope to the rest of the world. And this is true, I think, whenever God gives us hope. Whenever God gives hope, he expects us to both possess it and to proclaim it. Whenever God gives hope, whether it’s for the nation of Israel or it’s to a church or to us as individuals, he expects us to both possess that hope but also to proclaim it. We’re supposed to take hold of it. We’re supposed to live our lives in light of this hope that God has given us but we’re also supposed to proclaim it to the world. We’re supposed to be not hoarders of hope but pastors on of hope.

And the Jews were called for that purpose and God gave them several things that it was intended to make them distinct. He gave them rules and regulations about things they were supposed to eat and not eat, and things they’re supposed to do and not do. And all these rules, these old testament commandments, were intended to set the Israelites apart so that people could look at them and go, there’s something different going on there and to ask questions, “Why do you do this? Because God told you? Who is this God?” And so in that way, the things that made them distinctive allowed them to proclaim hope.

But, and this is a key thing, over time, it broke. Over time, they lost sight of that purpose. I don’t know how that happened because it goes all the way back to the very beginning, the first agreement God ever entered into with the Jewish people makes it incredibly clear. He said this. He said to Abraham, the first of the Jewish people, he said, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you and I’ll make your name great.” That’s hope, right? But then he said this, “And you will be a blessing. I’ll give you hope, but you’re supposed to pass it on. I’ll bless you but you’re supposed to be a blessing.” He said, “I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” You see it? God says, “I’m gonna give you hope, but you’re supposed to not only possess, you’re supposed to proclaim it.” That was why the Jewish people were called into existence as a nation.

But here’s the thing, over time, those things that were intended to allow the Jews to proclaim hope to the Gentiles became a point of hostility between them. The things that set the Jews apart became a source of hostility with those they were being set apart from. Now, we are gonna unpack that in just a moment but for now I want you to understand that’s not what God intended. That was not the plan. It was never supposed to be a source of hostility. But it is what happened. But God stepped in to change it. So in verse 13 Ephesians 2, we are told this, “But now, but now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh, the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two thus making peace. And in one body, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. He came and he preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have access to the father by one spirit.”

There’s a lot in that passage but we can kind of break it down to “a what, a how and a why. A what, a how, and a why.” And the “what” is just this, he says what Jesus did, Jesus has brought peace where there was hostility. Jesus brought peace where there was hostility. Now, there was hostility in a lot of levels. We know from earlier in the book of Ephesians, in some other places, there was hostility between each of us and God. Because of our line crossing and our mark missing, because of our sin, we had a hostile relationship with God himself, but God wanted to reconcile that. And there are several places in Ephesians where that’s the focus. But here the focus is not on God overcoming this hostility between us and him, here, he’s focused on overcoming the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. He says not only does Jesus bring people together with the father, but he brings people together. He brings Jew and Gentile together. Jesus has brought peace where there was hostility.

In other words, and make sure you get a hold on this, Jesus doesn’t save Jews and the Gentiles. He saves his church in which there was no distinction between Jew or Gentile. As far as God is concerned, the barrier his gone, the division is gone. He’s not saving Jews and Gentiles, he’s not saving here and over there and...no, he’s saving his people. He’s saving the church and in the church, this distinction is division between Gentile doesn’t exist anymore. He says, he wanted to create in himself one new humanity out of the two. He’s creating a raceless race. That’s what. That’s what he’s done.
Okay, how has he done it? This is a little bit harder. What the scriptures says is he destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. So the way that he brought the two together was he got rid of the thing that was in between them, this dividing wall of hostility. Okay, yeah, but what is that? What is this dividing wall that separated Jew from Gentile? And a lot of things have been said over the years but the only one that really makes sense to me out of what God says is to say that the dividing wall is the Old Testament rules and regulations, it’s the old testament commands. That’s what Jesus got rid of. I mean, that’s what he says. He says, “He destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law, with its commands and regulations.”

Jesus in his flesh set aside or made powerless the law as expressed in commands and regulations. He wanted to get rid of the hostilities, so he got rid of the barrier that was causing it which is the law. And here we begin to trade into some pretty deep theology. Because some of you may be thinking, “Okay, wait a minute. It sounds like Paul saying, Jesus got rid of the law.” But Jesus said, I didn’t come to get rid of the law. I didn’t come to abolish the law of the prophets, I came to fulfill them. So Jesus says, not getting rid of the law. Didn’t Paul just say, Jesus got rid of the law? Wait a minute, which is it? And the answer is that it’s both. And it’s not a contradiction because Jesus and Paul are both thinking about the law from different perspectives.

Jesus is talking about the principles on which the law is founded. Jesus when he says, “I didn’t come to abolish the law,” he’s talking about the principles on which the law was founded. Paul on the other hand is talking about specific rules and regulations that are based on those principles. And they are coming out from slightly different angles. It’s important to understand the difference. Jesus cared very much about the principles. He didn’t care that much about the specific regulations that expressed them. A good example, Jesus said, “You’ve heard they said, ‘don’t murder.’” That’s a specific regulation. But Jesus said, “I care about the principle. I care about the anger and the hurt that’s allowed to fester until it leads to murder.” He wanted to talk about the principles, the underlying issues. He said, “You’ve heard it said, don’t commit adultery.’ Yeah, that’s fine but here’s the thing, I am more concerned about the lust that’s allowed to fester until it leaves to adultery. I’m concerned about the principle behind it.”

Jesus didn’t care that much about specific rules and regulations but he cared about principles. Jesus broke some of the rules and regulations. I know that might sound a little bit radical but it’s absolutely undeniable. John chapter 5, John actually says this. He said, “For this reason, they try all the harder to kill Jesus because, not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he’s calling out his own father.” Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, two things here. First off, the Sabbath is one of those rules and regulations. The principle was have time for resting and reflection. Specific rule and regulation, every seventh day, no work. John says, he broke the Sabbath. He doesn’t say that’s what they accused him of. John under the inspiration of holy spirit says, Jesus broke the Sabbath. He broke the rule, he broke the regulation. Jesus didn’t care that much about the rule and the regulations.

There were rules and regulations that said to the Jews, “You can’t eat pork. You can’t eat shellfish,” and yet in the book of acts, Peter, a good Jewish man, has this vision where coming out of the heavens there’s a big blankets with pigs, pigs in a blanket apparently. It came down and the voice of Jesus said, “Take and eat and peter said, no, I’m not gonna do that. I’m not gonna eat anything unclean.” And Jesus said, “Don’t call unclean what I have declared clean.” That regulation is gone, that rule is gone. He cared about principles but not about the specific rules and regulations that came from them. Paul on the other hand, cares exactly the same about the principles, but the rules and regulations. He’s just following Jesus approach. He saying, “He set those aside.” What Jesus wanted to do, was he wanted to get rid of the hostility between Jews and Gentiles to say, “I’m going after the thing that has led to the hostility, the rules and the regulations, and I’m getting rid of them.”

Jesus set aside the rules and the regulations. What Jesus did on the cross was to pay the penalty for all of it. “If you miss the line or miss the mark of the regulations, I’m paying for it. If you cross the line or miss the mark of breaking the principles, I’ve paid for it. No matter how you’ve crossed the line, or missed the mark, I’ve paid for it.” Jesus set aside the rules and the regulations of the law. In order to bring peace where there had been hostility. He wanted to bring the two together. Okay, but why? Why did he want the Jew and Gentile together? Why did he go to that effort to bring them together, to get rid of the
thing that cause hostility? And by the way, why was there hostility? Because over time, those people who followed the rules and regulations, began to look with contempt upon those people who didn’t.

“You’re not as good as me because you don’t do this thing I do or you’re not as good as me because you do do this thing that it don’t do.” They began to look with contempt upon the Gentiles and it worked both ways. The Gentiles began to go, “Seriously? You are not gonna eat bacon? What is wrong with you? Why would you avoid this? Why would you dress like that? Why would you do this thing? Good night. How backwards are you?” And so the contempt went both ways that that wall of the rules and regulations became a wall of hostility. And Jesus said, “That’s not gonna work for me.” Okay, but why?

Well, I brought a little illustration about why. My daughter, Lenay, is really a gifted painter. I couldn’t bring a whole canvas this morning so I just pulled one of the canvas threads out of one of her pictures. She’s good, right? I mean she’s really good. And you’re thinking, maybe. Like you can’t tell, can you? Because you know what, this is not a big enough canvas to paint her pictures. In the same way, God looked at the Jews and he said, “I wanna paint a picture. I wanna do something in the world. You guys are not a big enough canvas for what I wanna do.” He looked at the Gentiles and he said, “You are not a big enough canvas. I need a bigger canvas.” And so he brought us together.

He said this, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners. You’re no longer strangers, but you’re fellow citizens with God’s people. There’s no outsider or insider, there’s no privileged and non-privileged.” You’re all fellow citizens to God’s people and you’re members of his household. You’re adopted as we saw a few weeks ago. You’re legitimate children in every way. You’re built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple of the lord. And in him, you two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. You see the promise? He says, Jew and Gentile, they come together to become a temple in which God dwells. That’s the promise.

God wants a canvas, God wants a building. He wants a dwelling where he can be present in such power that the world cannot fail to see the reality of who he is and of his love. God wants to show up. He wants to be in the church in such a way that nobody can miss the reality of his presence among us. He wants to be in power. Really here’ what’s happening, Jesus, brings us together so that he can show up through us in power. That’s really what this whole thing boils down to. Jesus brings us together so that he can show up through us in power. He needs the big canvas, he needs the big building because he’s a big God and it’s a big story. So he brings us together so that he can show up in power. That’s exciting, right?

I mean, that’s what we are as the church. We are the stage on which God wants to play out incredible things. He’s brought us all together so that he can show up through us in power. That’s exciting. There’s kind of a little bit of a glitch in it. He’s called us together so we can show up in power but we are not real good at being together. He’s gotten rid of the walls of hostility but we keep putting them back up. We erect barrier after barrier that separates us from other believers and from nonbelievers. And we proclaim that in Christ we are brought together so that he can show up through us in power but in reality, the togetherness is not...is not what it’s supposed to be.

The house that I live in, we moved into about a year ago. And it’s got one of those invisible fences. And I’d never had one of those, the dog gets a collar and if he gets too close he gets a shock. I never had one of those. I looked on YouTube and there were a bunch of videos about how you’re supposed to like train the dog. I’ll be honest with a couple of things, I can’t, it’s a lot of work. How hard can this thing be? She’s pretty smart dog. Only time I’ve ever actually taught that. So I put the collar on. I let her in the front yard and she’s like, “Yard no fence.” And she headed for the hedge, she got really closed and suddenly she’s like...She kind of backed up and she’s like, “What just happened?” I went over and I wanted to make sure she sees where the boundary was. I walked through another place, I got that from the YouTube video. I walked to another place. I thought I was gonna here like a warning beep or something. That didn’t happen so we kept getting closer and suddenly she’s like...

I kind of broke my dog, I’ll be honest, because there was a period where she would not go outside. We would drag her on to the
front pouch and she's like, “I'm doing my business right here, concrete is good enough for me.” She did not want into the grass. And over time we finally started to fix him. We got closer. But here's the thing that got really hard, whenever we wanted to take her for a walk, she wanted nothing to do with it. We'd kind of call her and she would see the lead and she's like excitement and then like, “But then there's that wall of hostility right there. That's a hostile boundary. Have I ever seen one?”

And so we would have to like coax her and we were like [inaudible 00:30:08] saying, “It's okay. Look the collar is off. See I'm holding the collar.” And she's like, “I'm a dog. I don't know what you're talking about.” “It's okay.” And she'd come a step closer. And then we pat her, “It's okay, it's okay.” She's shaking and we'd get a step closer. And it will take us five minutes to get over the line. And then once she's over the line, she's like, “Okay. All right it's gone. And then we go and we have this walk and we come back. And if we get closer to the house, you could see it going again. She's getting tensed and we'd have to repeat the whole thing in reverse. “It's okay, one more step. It's okay. come one, it's okay, it's gonna be fine.”

Now, I'd like you to imagine with me for a second. What if I went through that whole process. It's okay. There's nothing that's gonna bite you. Nothing bad, the hostility is all gone and I got her closer, step, but I had forgotten to take the collar off. I had forgotten to turn the fence off, and I went through that five minutes of getting her there and she finally got off there and she's like, “Okay, I trust you.” You think I'd ever get over that line again? But here's the thing, we do it in the church all the time. “The dividing walls are gone.” No, they are not. “We are all together as one.” No, you're not. No, we're not. We put them back up. And they look different. Maybe not the Jew-Gentile thing although that one happens too. According to God, there's one raceless human race, one humanity, but I'm gonna be honest, there's not a whole lot of Jewish believers in here. Just a few. But there's Jewish congregations, Jewish Christian congregations, not a lot of Gentile believers there. We are still pretty separated.

I know, we are not hostile overtly but we are still living on opposite sides. And you know what, there's other barriers. There's racial barriers. There's black churches and white churches. There's Chinese churches. There's Korean churches. There's Hispanic...I mean there's just all these different kinds of churches. I mean, we are still kind of drawing the lines, right? And you go, “Okay, yeah. But I'm not forcing that.” And honestly that's probably true. You're probably not forcing it. I'm probably not forcing it but I also have to wrestle with the fact that I may not be working against that kind of separation. So tell me what happens when a person of another ethnic identity comes into a place like this. You know, I'd like to think that they're welcomed by the things we don't do. It's the handshake that's not offered. It's the word of welcome that's not offered.

And I can tell you, I've been on the opposite side. I've had the chance of speaking in some churches where I was the minority, and I've definitely felt that. Nobody would say you're not welcomed here. They wouldn't say that, but you know what, that's kind of what comes across when not many people say hello, and not many people hold out their hand, and not many people make me feel like they're really glad that I'm here. So it's not always stuff we do, a lot of times it's the stuff we don't do. We put up those barriers. We've got racial distinction. We've got economic distinctions. There's economic barriers that people come in and they go, “You know what, I'm not dressed like these people are. Am I really welcomed?” And again, there's no handshake, there's no enthusiastic greeting. They find themselves a seat and they realize that a lot of people going by and kind of looking and sitting somewhere else.

We put up barriers. We divide on the basis of our worship styles. We divide on the basis of our bible translations. There's a church not far from what could grow up. And I've seen it time and time again that what we see on the sign and the church out-front on their sign is, “King James only.” It gets better, “1611 version.” It's on their sign, “We're King James only, 1611 bible translation church.” Tell me there's not some hostility going on there. We put up these boundaries, we put up these barriers, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes not by what we do but by what we don't do but it all works in the same way. It creates division among the people of God. But Jesus calls us together so that he can show up through us in power. Which means that when we are not engaged in the work of being together, his story doesn't get read as loud as it's supposed to. His glory does not shine as it's supposed to.
So the question I want to challenge you with today is just this, how is Jesus calling you? How is Jesus calling me? I’m wrestling with this. How is Jesus calling me to participate on his work of bringing us together so that he can show up through us in power? And maybe that’s something you need to stop doing or maybe it’s something you need start doing. I don’t know. But how is God calling you to participate in this work of bringing us together so that he can show up through us in power? Let me give you three things as we close here that I think get in the way.

And the first of those is the “I am comfortable” thing. Sometimes, working to bridge gaps and to overcome barriers, it involve us becoming uncomfortable. And I struggle with this like in my neighbor and I live in this new neighborhood and there’s some neighbors that I have not reached out to because honestly I’m not quite sure how to do it. I don’t know what it looks like to build a relationship with those people because they’re differently than me and it starts to feel a little bit uncomfortable. Maybe you see somebody coming into church that you know, they’re a little different for whatever reason here and you think, “Well, maybe I should reach out. But you know what, I’m not really sure how to do that. I don’t know what to say. It’s really kind of uncomfortable.”

I have some bad news for you. God doesn’t care about your comfort. I’m serious. God does not care about your comfort. I’ve been there. I’ve had him tell me that over and over again. I don’t know how I keep losing track of it. I go, “God, you know, I know I should do this but it’s just kind of uncomfortable.” And God kind of goes, “Yeah, which part of the gospel makes you think I care about your comfort.” “Right, sorry.” But our comfort can keep us from participating in Jesus work of bringing together so that he can show up in power.

The other one is the “I’m confused.” And what I mean by that is, we confuse our agenda, our preferences, with God’s. “This is what I like. This is the way I think it should be done. Therefore, that’s the way Jesus wants it done. What I like is definitely what Jesus likes, right? Kind of music I like is definitely the kind of music Jesus likes.” I learned this one recently the hard way. Some part of the generation that fought the worship wars. And what I mean by that is I was part of a church that we had to push really hard to be allowed to bring in acoustic guitar into a service. And then we decided, “We are just going hog wattle, let’s have a gym bay and we do drums.” It was rough. Because liked to sanctify their opinions. You know, “No, no, a beat, that’s of the devil.” No, it’s not. It’s just what you like. And you don’t like this. But see, I helped to fight that. I’m all, let you know, let’s be culturally [inaudible 00:37:57] this new stuff.

And then a couple of months ago, I went to the Hillsong United concert. That’s the Pepsi center. And it’s a worship event. And I went in and this whole thing started. And I began to realize a couple of things. First thing was, it is really loud. And I put some Kleenex in my ears but I felt like it was too loud. I was a little uncomfortable with how loud it was and I genuinely put Kleenex in my ears. And the second thing I began to think was this, “I don’t really like this music. I don’t.” It was like, I mean, it was very new. There was like a lot of electronic going on. It was just like, “I don’t really...I’m not really worshiping with this stuff.” And then I made a mistake. I looked around. And I realized the Pepsi center was packed. I don’t know how many that seats, 20,000, 30,000. It was packed and most of them were a lot younger than me. And I noticed something and that is, they weren’t watching a concert, they were worshiping Jesus. They were singing at the top of their lungs. That was partly where the volume was coming from.

And I looked around, and I realized, “Huh, this is not my music. This is not really the way I like this, but worship is happening.” Who cares if it’s my style? Who cares if it’s my preference? My preferences are not necessarily due. Worship is happening and then suddenly I found myself trying to figure out how to sing and how to join into that. And I can’t believe that I had moment even of like, “It’s too loud and it’s not the right kind of...right.” I got confused. Confused my agenda with Jesus. I confused my preferences with Jesus’.

And the third thing, “I need get in the ways that conflicted. I’m conflicted.” And what I mean by that is, “I’m too invested in the things that don’t really matter to be able to have the bandwidth to invest in the things that do. I’m so caught up in my stuff and all the things that I do that I don’t have any room to be working on the things that really count.” Now, it’s not circumcision
versus uncircumcision but we’ve all got those things. And they’re not obviously bad things but I’m too invested on the things that don’t have an internal impact so I don’t have room for the things that do. I don’t have room to get involved in Jesus’ work of bringing us together so that he can show up in power.

This weekend is the global experience weekend here. And you may notice on your way in, there’s some new displays and I’m super excited about them. I’m excited about the fact that this church is committed to bridging barriers, to going into out all the earth and share the gospel with people that are different from us and that are separate from us in a variety of ways but we are committed to overcoming that because we know that Jesus drives us together so that he can show up through us in power. And so, we are gonna watch a video in just a second about the work that this church is engaged in Poland. And as you’re watching, I want you to do two things. Number one, I want you to praise God for what he’s doing, as he drives people from every tribe and tongue, every nation together. And the second thing I want you to ask is this, “How is Jesus calling me to help his agenda? Globally, locally, maybe right here in this body.”

Going to all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. This is basically the last thing Jesus said to his followers before ascending into heaven. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation, every person, every nation.” Now, I know what you’re thinking. This parting message was for pastors and missionaries and people that are called into this type of work. Let me guess, you’ve been called to stay here and be a good influence. But you know what I think, I think this calling is keeping you from fulfilling God’s plan for his kingdom and his purpose for your life. Did you know that in Poland, 99% of the people they’re un-church. That’s 38 million people in one country who need to hear the gospel, the same gospel that frees us, the same gospel that Jesus pleads with us to share with the world.

One of our partners in Poland leads a church of 130 people. And in this past year, 11 were baptized. We may think these numbers are small but in heaven, angels rejoice. And with one voice, so should we. You can do more than just rejoice. You can go. Go to Poland. Go play soccer. Go teach English. Go share the gospel. You can send. Be part of God’s transforming story in Poland by sending others to go. You can pray. Pray about going. Pray about sending. Pray for those going. Pray for people to be reached with the gospel. Go, send, pray. Check out the lobby to find ways that you can go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation.