Craig // Hey, welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here for -- wow, week number four already, of the "Mission Killers" series. I'm loving this series. If you are just joining us, let me explain why we are calling it "Mission Killers." What we are doing is we are taking a look at the things that can take us off mission with Jesus, because the reality is that being on mission with Jesus is just -- it's just part of the Christian life. It's not an optional third or fourth tier kind of thing. The moment we say yes to following Jesus, we say yes to being on mission with him. He said, come follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men. Come follow me, and you are going to join me on mission in the world. The problem is, the moment we say yes to following Jesus, the moment we say yes to being on mission with him, the world starts sending out mission killers, T-1,000 terminators whose job is to take us off of mission. We've been talking about what some of those mission killers are. Today we are going to talk about one that I call "The Deeper Deception."

The strategy of the deeper deception to get you off mission with Jesus is to say, hey, the Gospel isn't enough. If all you've got is the Gospel, you got nothing. If all you've got is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, you can't be on mission with Jesus. You need this other thing. You need to go deeper. You need this other stuff, and until you have it, you really don't have anything to offer the world. The Gospel is not enough. But Jesus says that could not be more wrong. If you have the Gospel, you have everything you need to be on mission with Jesus. Yet, I do believe this deeper deception is something the Church has always struggled with to a certain extent. Why don't you go ahead and grab a Bible. We are going to take a look at one of the first churches to struggle with it. We are going to find Jesus' words to that church in Revelation -- easy to find, last book of the Bible, chapter 2, verse 18. Jesus is writing to a church that is struggling with the deeper deception, this idea that the Gospel wasn't enough.

He says to the church in a city called Thyatira, to the angel of the church in Thyatira write this. Just real quick, if you haven't been with us, that may seem like a strange thing for him to say. Like why does he write to the angel of the church, and what we have said all along is the angel of the church is a personification of the mission of the church. It's a reminder to the church, hey, you have a message that you are supposed to be holding up high. Your mission is to share that message with the world. So Jesus begins each church by reminding them, hey, you exist to be on mission with me. You exist to share this message with the world. He reminds them of that, and then he says this, these are the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. In every one of these letters, Jesus starts off by identifying himself to the church in a particular way.

He says some truths about himself to the church, and they are different for each church, and the reason for that is what Jesus is doing is he's giving each church that what specific church needs to fight off the mission killer they were facing, to fight off the specific mission killer. And so when we pay attention to what he says to each church about himself, we immediately begin to understand what the particular mission killer they were facing was.

So here at the church of Thyatira he says three things. These are the words of the Son of God. What he's saying is basically this: Hey, you can trust what I say, I know what I'm talking about because who I am. He says, I'm not a teacher. I'm not even a great teacher. I'm not even a great prophet that God has given insight. I'm the Son of God myself. I'm not talking at a distance. I'm talking about myself. You can trust what I say because of who I am. Then he says, his eyes are like blazing fire. Which is let's just be honest, is not the most warm and welcoming image of Jesus, right? The eyes of blazing fire. You're not like I just want to give that guy a big hug, right? That's a weird kind of thing, and here's the reason why he does that. In the ancient world, the belief was we didn't see because light went into our eyes. We saw because light came out of our eyes. That was the belief, and so the people who have brighter light coming out of their eyes see better, which sounds weird.

I know. If you are a Marvel fan, like cyclops. Does that mean anything to anybody? He's the guy that when the glasses come off, laser beams shoot out. That guy would have had penetrating insight. Jesus is kind of doing that. Like I'm cyclops, right? I have this blazing fire leaping out of my eyes. But what he means by that is I see better than anybody else. My insights are more penetrating than anybody else's. He says you can trust what I say because of who I am, and you can trust what I say because I have better insight. I see better than anybody else, so you can trust what I say. Then he says, his feet are like burnished bronze. That just means that what he says is rock solid. It's steady. It's stable. Bronze was the symbol of a solid foundation.

So what he says is hey, you can trust what I have to say because of who I am. You can trust what I have to say because I see better than anyone else and because of that, what I say is firm ground for you. It's solid ground. If you will trust in what I tell you, you will be on solid ground. On
the other hand, if you don’t trust what I say, if you trust what someone else says, you are on shaky ground. That immediately tells us that the church in Thyatira was struggling with someone who was saying, you need to listen to me, not to Jesus. Somebody who was saying, I have some insight. I have some words from God or about God that you need to pay attention to. What Jesus was saying, if you listen to that, you are getting off of the firm foundation I’m setting for you, and that’s dangerous.

Now, he doesn’t immediately tell us who that person is. First, he gives us some really powerful praise for this church. Verse 19 he says this, he says I know your deeds, your love and your faith, your service and your perseverance that you are now doing more than you did at first. And that’s some powerful praise. That’s a lot of praise there. He says I know your deeds. Throughout the series we have seen that, that is a word that often reflects the work of the church to share the Good News of the Gospel, to hold the light of the Gospel up high for everyone to see. He says, you are doing that. He says, I know about your love, which could be two things, love for the lost they are sharing the Gospel with. It could also be love for Jesus. Honestly, those two are inseparable. Because Jesus loves the lost. He says I came to seek and to save the -- lost. So if we are going to love Jesus, we have to also love those that he loves. He says, I know about your love. Probably both you love me but also love those that I love. You are doing a great job with that.

He says I know about your faith, you’re trusting me even when things are hard. I know about your service, you served me. I know about your perseverance. Even when things are difficult, you have pushed on through it. You have kept going, and then he says the most amazing thing. He says and I know that you are now doing more than you did at first. That’s incredible praise. All the more so because if you were here at the beginning of the series, the first church at Ephesus, he says the opposite to. He says, when you first got started as a church, you were doing a great job holding the light of the Gospel up to the world. You did a great job loving the lost. But he said, you are not doing that anymore. That’s in the past, not in the present. You need to turn around. To the church of Thyatira he says, not only were you doing that when you got started, you are doing more of it now than in the beginning. You are more of a church now than you were when the church got started. That’s unbelievable.

Also, let’s be honest, it’s unusual. That’s not the way it usually happens. I have been in vocational ministry for 25 years now. In that 25 years, I have seen a lot of church plants get started. And I see a really similar progression every time. The church gets started. They say, hey, we are going to share the Gospel with the lost. That’s why the Church exists. That’s what God has called us to do. We are going to shine the light of the Gospel. We are going to bring the Gospel to people, and it works. They succeed. People get saved. Lost people get found. They come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. They become followers of Jesus. Then, almost inevitably what happens, the church goes, oh my goodness, we have all of these new believers. We have to get some programs to take care of them.

We have to get Sunday school and men’s groups and women’s groups, and student groups. We have to get all of this stuff, and hear me, there’s nothing wrong with them. Those are all good things, but, this is the danger the Church always faces. Over time, programs can choke out purpose, you hear me? Over time the programs we have to have because of the success, we have succeeded as a church. We have shown the light of the Gospel. People have become followers of Jesus. Now we have to take care of them, so we have these programs and over time, maintaining those programs can choke out the purpose of the church. I know this because if you take a drive through the United States of America, you will see in little town after little town as well as big city after big city, thousands of churches that are just empty buildings. They are full of -- they are not full of people. They are not full of people at all.

There is a little contingent of 20 or 30 people filling a big building, and they haven’t seen a salvation in years. They haven’t had a baptism in years because over time programs can choke out purpose. But Jesus says to the church of Thyatira, not for you guys. You are more of a church now than when you first got started. That’s unbelievable. All the more so because it’s unusual. And I just -- if I can, let me break away from the Bible for a second -- can I just brag on Mission Hills for a little bit? Not because of anything I have done. This is true long before I got here. I honestly believe Jesus would say the same thing to this church.

On all of our campuses right now, you are hearing me say that I believe Jesus would say to Mission Hills, you are more of a church now than 76 years ago when you got started. Did you know that this church is 76 years old? I believe Jesus would say, you are more of a church now than when you got started. Part of the reason I say that is because two years ago when I was wrestling through whether or not God was calling me to come here as a leader, I didn’t really want to make that transition. I was in a place I was really happy, but I was invited to sit down with the head of the search team for the lead pastor. Part of the reason I did it was because I had a question I wanted to get answered. I had asked the question several different times. That is, I knew that about eight years ago from now, at the time it was six years ago, Mission Hills had just exploded. It had just grown by leaps and bounds, and I asked a bunch of people, what happened? And different people gave me different answers. All the answers are pretty similar. I had some people go, well, Mission Hills built a Littleton campus, and you know, it’s a really good building, and I went, yeah, I know. I can see some growth from that. And some people said the Littleton campus is in a great location. And I said, yeah, it is. I can see some growth from that. They said, well, the Littleton campus has a great kids ministry. I said, yeah, again, I can see some growth from that. All of those things are true, and I can imagine all of those things lead to 20, 30, 40% growth. The problem is that Mission Hills saw like 300% growth. I had been asking people what happened, and those were the answers I got.

So partly I sat down with the leader of the search team because I wanted that question answered, and I said, hey, tell me what happened, in the first part of the conversation. He said, I’m going to tell you what I think happened: God renewed our passion for the lost, for reaching the lost with the Gospel. And when He did that, the people embraced it, and lost people came, and they got saved, and we were seeing salvations every week.
We were seeing baptisms, and it was just crazy. And I had two thoughts. Okay, that, I get that. That explains it. Second thought was, oh no. I said oh, no because I felt myself at the top of the rollercoaster about to plummet. I went into the conversation, and I thought it doesn’t make any sense for me to think about that, but I heard that, and my heart leapt in my chest. In a church that’s 74 years old that’s more interested in doing the work of the Church in the world than it was 74 years ago? I might like to be part of that. Oh, no. God, what are you doing? And the thing is, I genuinely think that Jesus would say to the church of Mission Hills what he said to the church of Thyatira, you are more of a church now than you were 76 years ago. We see people get saved every week. We see baptisms every time they roll around, it’s incredible and it’s not me.

It’s absolutely not me. I wouldn’t have come here if I didn’t already deeply believe that it was true of this church, but I see it every bit as much true 2 years later as I did back then. That’s just awesome. Listen to me, I believe the words of Jesus to the church at Thyatira are the words to all of us at Mission Hills. You are doing more now than you were at first. That’s awesome, isn’t it?

My hope is that he would say the good things to us but not the bad things. He does have a bad thing. The next thing he says, nevertheless I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophet. He says, you have a problem in the house. You have somebody in the house who is – she’s taking people off of the foundation. She’s claiming to have words from me, but she doesn’t actually have words from me, and the problem, he says, is that you are tolerating her. Understand, I realize in our culture today that tolerance is the greatest possible virtue, right?

So Jesus just told the church, hey, you are not tolerant enough. But make sure we understand what he’s upset about. It’s not that they are loving somebody who is broken, okay? It’s not that they are loving somebody who is sinful. Let’s just be honest. How many of you have ever done anything wrong? Come on. In your whole life at some point, last year? In the last month? On your way here today? Here’s the thing. We love you. We are all like you. We are all broken. We are all sinful. We are all being transformed by Jesus. None of us are there yet, okay? So loving broken people is not the problem. The problem is, he says, it’s not that you tolerate them by loving. The problem is you are allowing her to have a platform. You are allowing her to continue to influence my people in such a way that is taking them off of the foundations of the Gospel itself.

That’s what he says is the problem, and the first sign that they shouldn’t have been doing that for her, they shouldn’t be giving her a platform is that she calls herself a prophet. That’s actually the first red flag that she calls herself a prophet. I did the work on this the past couple of weeks. There are 570 uses of the word prophet in the Bible, which is a fair amount. 570 uses. Of the 570+ uses, guess how many of them involve somebody calling themselves a prophet? Two. The first one is Moses. Let’s just be honest, Moses probably gets a pass on it, right? Like if you part the Red Sea, you can be like – “prophet.” Even Moses, check this out, even Moses didn’t call himself a prophet until the end of his life. At the end of his life, he said to the Israelite people who were mourning his passing, he said, God will give you another prophet like me. He was like, I’m not that big of a deal. There will be another prophet arise, don’t you worry about it. God has your back.

At the end of his life he did it. The only other exception, the only place in scripture where somebody calls themselves a prophet, I Kings 13 where the guy -- liar. He was lying. He was a false prophet, which means that the moment this woman called herself a prophet, people should have gone, okay, hang on a second. I’m not saying somebody can’t be a true prophet and ever call themselves a prophet? Two. The first one is Moses. Let’s just be honest, Moses probably gets a pass on it, right? Like if you part the Red Sea, you can be like – “prophet.” Even Moses, check this out, even Moses didn’t call himself a prophet until the end of his life. At the end of his life, he said to the Israelite people who were mourning his passing, he said, God will give you another prophet like me. He was like, I’m not that big of a deal. There will be another prophet arise, don’t you worry about it. God has your back.

And I have learned over the 25 years of vocational ministry, when I get an e-mail from someone who announces themselves as a prophet, there is one good way to handle that – delete. Because I have yet to see in these 25 years, anybody who said, I’m a prophet and then had anything to say that was consistent with God’s word and spoke to me as the voice of God. I have not seen that happen. I have had some people say to me, I think that person over there is a prophet. Sometimes that person has had some things to say to me that I needed to pay attention to. I’m not saying that somebody can’t call themselves a prophet and it be true, but the moment someone says you ought to listen to me because I’m a prophet, the more we go, we’ll wait and see. I get e-mails every week from prophets. Did you know that? I do. From all over the world people send them to me. Prophet Obadiah. Prophet Odessa. A lot of them have “0’s;” I don’t know why that is.

And I have learned over the 25 years of vocational ministry, when I get an e-mail from someone who announces themselves as a prophet, there is one good way to handle that – delete. Because I have yet to see in these 25 years, anybody who said, I’m a prophet and then had anything to say that was consistent with God’s word and spoke to me as the voice of God. I have not seen that happen. I have had some people say to me, I think that person over there is a prophet. Sometimes that person has had some things to say to me that I needed to pay attention to. I’m not saying that somebody can’t call themselves a prophet and it be true, but the moment someone says you ought to listen to me because I’m a prophet, the more we go, we’ll wait and see. And the problem with this woman named Jezebel, probably not her real name, by the way, we’ll explain in a second why she’s called that.

With this woman named Jezebel, if you wait and see, what you saw wasn’t the fruit of a true prophet. Here’s what it says next, her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. There’s your second red flag. This isn’t somebody who should have had a platform in the church because by her teaching, this is the fruit she produces, sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. Jesus is very clear. You will know a false prophet by the fruit they produce, by what their teaching leads to. And her fruit was bad. By the way, what Jesus says about this woman explains why she was called Jezebel. There was a woman in the Old Testament named Jezebel who did the same things. She misled God’s people, the Israelites, led them into worshiping idols and sexual immorality. So he calls her Jezebel here. It’s probably not her given name, but she’s acting just like Jezebel. It’s like if someone betrayed you, you might call them a Judas. You might call them a Benedict Arnold.

You say, here’s a historical figure. You are acting just like that one. That’s what he says here. This woman is doing the same thing. Now these two things that her fruit, this is what her teaching’s producing, this fruit, they actually go closely together, and we tend to think of them separately. She’s doing these two different things, but they are actually very closely linked. See in the ancient world in Greek cities there were Greek temples, and in Greek temples were Greek idols. Idols to the Greek gods, and one of the ways you worshiped those idols, you sacrificed food. You know, you sacrifice a cow. The problem with once you sacrifice a cow, like, there’s still some good steak that comes out of that thing, right? The
idol doesn’t consume it, so what are you supposed to do with filet mignon sitting on the altar? The answer is, you throw a festival. You throw a party.

The food that’s been sacrificed to idols, you consume in these festivals, and you have to wash down the food, right? Filet mignon is no good without a good red wine, right? So they also drank a lot of wine, and they got a little bit looser. Once they got a little bit looser, guess what started to happen at these festivals? Sexual immorality. Sexual activity, sexual intimacy outside of the boundaries that God has set in scripture. They are very closely linked, food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, very closely linked. We might go, what on Earth would have led the people in the church to follow her teaching in such a way that led to that? And to understand why they might have been tempted in that, you have to understand the function of the festivals in the life of the city, because they weren’t just religious festivals, they were also civic festivals. They were times when the whole city came together. They were major times of rubbing shoulders and connecting with people.

In fact, a lot of business got done at those things. If you were not at the festivals, you missed out on big business deals. In fact, if you were not at the festivals people would notice. Why wasn’t so and so at the festival? Because they’re a follower of Jesus? Zeus may not like that. Zeus may not like it if those people are not coming. Zeus may punish the city if they won’t participate in his worship. So not only did you miss out on opportunities, but you also found yourself ostracized because you were doing things that could cause the gods to get mad at us by not participating. So it just got worse and so by not participating in the festivals, you actually suffered. You lost out on business opportunities. People wouldn’t buy and sell with you. People began to think very negatively about you, blame things that would happen in the city on you because you displeased the gods. So, not going to the festivals was a big deal.

So apparently what had happened, Jezebel, or her namesake, was stuck on a teaching where she basically allowed the Christians to, hey, you don’t have to miss out on those opportunities. It’s okay. You can go to the festivals. You can even participate in the festival to the point, this other stuff, it doesn’t matter. There is no reason for you to suffer the hardships for following Jesus. You can engage in all of these things, avoid all of that suffering because it’s okay. It doesn’t matter. Now we don’t know how she did that yet. We are going to see it in a second, but that’s the nature of her teaching. We don’t know exactly what it was yet, but we know exactly how Jesus felt about it. This is what he says. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

No uncertain terms about it, what she’s doing is wrong, he says. But I want you to notice he says, I have given her what? I have given her time. That’s grace, right? That’s love. In spite of the horrible thing that she’s doing, the terrible damage she’s doing the church, I have given her time. He still loves her. He still wants her to come to repentance. That’s grace. But in spite of all of the time, she is unwilling. She has no intention of changing. The time has run out. So he says verse 22, I will cast her in a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely unless they repent of her ways. There is a lot of irony in that because what she was teaching was essentially, hey, you don’t have to suffer for the name of Jesus. You can do all of these things. He says, yeah, she’s teaching you how to avoid suffering, but guess what? It’s going to lead to what? Much worse suffering.

A little irony, she’s leading them to sexual immorality. He says I’m going to throw her on a bed of suffering. Not a bed of pleasure, a bed of pain, bed of suffering. He says those who commit adultery with her will suffer intensely. And that’s probably ironic in part because it’s literally true. They are literally committing adultery, sexual immorality, but what he really means by adultery there is they are not faithful to me anymore. They are faithful to her teaching. They are committing adultery by following her teaching. So they are going to suffer too. They won’t avoid suffering. They’ll actually reap it. Then in verse 23 he says, I will strike her children dead. Which I know sounds really harsh, but understand, it’s not literal. What he’s saying is, not only does she have people who are following her teaching, but now she has children who are carrying on her legacy. They are not just following her teaching, they are teaching other people to do the same thing.

They are joining her in leading people off of the foundations of the Gospel itself. That’s when he says, hey, it’s not that they are just off mission with me. They’re now on mission with her. I can’t allow that. I have to stop it. He says, then, all of the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will pay each of you according to your deeds. He says, I’m going to stop it. Nobody’s going to miss that I have stopped it, and then all of the churches will know, I understand what is going on there, and ultimately, I will pay each according to their deeds. Understand what he means by deeds here. The temptation is to go, this is why everyone believes there is a balance scale when you get to the gates of Heaven, right? If you did more bad things that good things, you get kicked out. If you did more good things than bad things, you get in because he repays according to our deeds, right? Yeah, but that’s not the Gospel.

The Gospel over and over again in scripture is nobody’s worthy. Nobody is good enough, but while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He came. He died on the cross to forgive all of the bad deeds, and simply by trusting in him, we go to Heaven when we die. That’s that piece of the Good News. What does he mean he pays each according to their deeds? He’s talking about mission. He’s talking about mission, and what he’s saying is, who are we on mission with matters. Who we are on mission with matters. He just said there are some people that not only have gone off mission with me, they have gone on mission with her, taking people away from me. There’s going to be consequences for that. Whose mission we are on matters. The reality is, and I know this is not P.C., you can be on mission with Jesus, or you can be on mission with... someone else. What he says next, verse 24.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets. You can be on
mission with Jesus, or you can be on mission with who? I know that’s not P.C. I didn’t say it. Jesus did. Now, it takes lots of different shapes, and lots of different forms, but that’s the options. That’s why I’m saying who you are on mission with matters. You are either on mission with Jesus, or you are on mission with his enemy. He says, but some of you there are not on mission with Satan, because you haven’t learned this woman’s so-called deep secrets, and that’s the first hint that we get of specifically what her teaching was, how she was taking people away from the Gospel itself. She was teaching so called “deep secrets.” Which sounds like we should all go, “Ooh.”

Let’s all do that. Go, Ooh. Deep secrets, sounds intriguing, right? What Jezebel was probably teaching is something we call Gnosticism. Late in the first century, moving into the second century there was a school of thought that developed in the Roman Empire called Gnosticism, and it was kind of a religious philosophy. At its core, what Gnosticism said was, to be saved, to be free, what you need to know is you need to know deep secrets. There is knowledge that will set you free. Now we can’t just give you the knowledge. You have to earn your way to it. You have to work your way up through the levels and systems, you have to be initiated into the different, like, tiers. At this point you learn deeper, see the higher you go the deeper the secrets you learn, but the secrets are necessary to set you free. Gnosticism flourished in part because it was so good at taking some of the language of existing religions and borrowing it and compromising it.

It spread into Christianity in the early years. It spread into Judaism. It spread into the Greek religion because it used their language. For Christianity what it said was, hey, all we are saying to you is the same thing Jesus said. We are telling you, you need to know things to be saved. That’s exactly what Jesus said, did he not? He said the what will set you free? The truth. That’s what Jesus said, you have to know things. If you know truth, it will set you free. The difference was that Jesus trafficked in “out in the open” truth, right? Not deep secret hidden truth. Jesus said, yeah, the truth will set you free. Who is the truth? Him. He said I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. Out in the open, here’s what it is. Here, it’s all out on the table. The truth is this, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, me. And whoever believes in me will not perish but have eternal life. Out in the open secret. He said the truth that you need to know is that God loves you so much, He sent me the die in your place, to purchase your forgiveness and having risen from the dead to offer you forgiveness and new life.

That’s the out in the open secret. Gnosticism said, yeah, it’s truth just like Jesus said you have to know truth, but they are hidden. You have to work your way through it, so Jesus says this, I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come because the secrets that you had to learn in Gnosticism, they were a burden. You had to work hard. You had to prove your worthiness. You had to work your way up to be able to learn these new truths that would supposedly set you free. He says, no, that’s not the way it works. I won’t impose that kind of burden on you. The truth you need to know, it’s out front. It’s out there for everybody to see. You don’t need to go down to Barnes and Noble to get it. You don’t need to get it on Amazon. In fact, you can’t. Not even on Prime Day, because it’s already out there. It’s the simple Gospel. You just have to decide whether or not you will trust him. That’s it.

So he says, I don’t want to impose any other burden on you except hold on to what you have until I come, which is what? It’s the simple Gospel. God loves you so much He sent His Son to die for you. He rose from the dead three days later, and he offers you forgiveness and new life by simple faith. Simple faith in the simple Gospel. It’s all out on the table. He says hold on to that. He says this, to the one who is victorious. Victorious how? By holding on to that simple Gospel. By not letting anybody say, no, no, no. You need something else. You have to have this other thing. You have to have these secrets. You have to go deeper here. No, whose victorious by holding on to my simple Gospel and who does my will to the end. What’s his will? It’s to hold the Gospel up. Hold on and hold it up. The simple Gospel, the one who does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, the nations that have attacked you, the nations that have led you to suffering that have persecuted you. You will end up with authority over them.

Then he quotes from a Psalm, Psalm 2 he says, that one, the one who holds on and holds it up, he will rule over them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery. It is a sign of their authority, just as I have received authority from my Father. I would also give that one the morning star. That’s an interesting kind of a statement. I’ll be honest, I’m not entirely sure what it means. There are two major possibilities. One is that Jesus is the morning star. In the New Testament he is described as the morning star on a couple of occasions, and it could be that he’s saying to the one who holds on to the simple Gospel and holds up the simple Gospel, I will give them myself. I don’t lean in that direction mainly because in the flow of this, it’s all about authority he’s giving them.

It’s about turning the tables. He says, yeah, I know you are suffering. Yeah, I know you have been abused. Yeah, I know the nations have come against you, but those tables are going to turn, which means that I suspect that the morning star here is actually Satan. In the Old Testament, Satan is called the morning star because he was one of the shining angels of God who fell and became a demonic spirit. And in the flow of the authority here, and because of the Old Testament reference that this church would have known he says, not only will the nations be under your authority, but if you will hold on to the simple Gospel and hold up the simple Gospel, be on mission with me, I’ll give you authority even over the devil himself. The one who claims, because he just mentioned him, right? Claims to have these deep secrets you need to know. Jesus says, you don’t need any of that. You need simple faith in the simple Gospel.

He says, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Hear this Good News, he says. Hear what I promise. Honestly, it’s not just the promises we find here. Those tables being turned is impressive, but the Bible is filled with the promises of God. The Bible is filled with incredible promises. Jesus says all of the promises are yours through simple faith in the simple Gospel. Everything Jesus promises is ours through simple faith in this simple Gospel. You don’t need deeper secrets. There are no deeper secrets. There is nothing deeper than the Gospel. You don’t need deeper truth. There is nothing more true, nothing more foundational than the simple Gospel.

REAL. MESSY. NEW.
Everything Jesus promises is ours through simple faith in the what? In the simple Gospel. Everything Jesus promises is ours through simple faith in the simple Gospel. Kind of.

You also need to understand the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism.

[Laughter]

You don’t. But you see, this happens in churches all the time. Yeah, yeah, the simple Gospel is great, but you also need to get a handle on this thing because this thing will really, really set you free. This thing will really allow you to embrace all of the promises and the power of God. Listen, it’s just not true. If you want to talk Calvinism or Arminianism, how many of you know what I’m talking about? How many of you have no idea what on Earth I’m talking about? That’s totally fine, but I have seen churches split over that issue. Churches that lost sight of the simple Gospel. They went off mission with Jesus because they were so caught up in debating these things. Listen, you want to talk Calvinism or Arminianism, I will talk your ear off. You call the church. You make an appointment with my assistant. We’ll sit down. I will bore you to death.

I can talk that. I can talk deep theology. People might come to you and say, no, it’s not Calvinism or Arminianism. You need a private prayer language. That’s the missing thing. That’s what you really need to experience the power of God. No, no, no. You need to speak in tongues. That’s the missing thing. That’s the deeper truth you have. I’m going to tell you it’s a lie. I’m not saying there is no private prayer language. I’m not saying speaking in tongues is not Biblical. I’m not saying any of that. I’m saying the moment somebody tells you that’s what you really need to be on mission with Jesus, you say stop. Everything Jesus promises is ours through simple faith in the simple what? In the simple Gospel. Everything else is gravy. Everything else is gravy.

If you want to go deeper with Jesus, go wider with the Gospel. If you want to go deeper with Jesus -- I always want people to go deeper with Jesus -- the best way to do that, the best way to go deeper with Jesus is to go wider with his good news. To claim the simple Gospel and what it makes you as a child of God, and then to proclaim the simple Gospel to a watching world. Hold on to it. Hold it up, and you will go deeper with Jesus in ways you never imagined, ways your theology books will never accomplish.

Please hear me, I believe in the importance of doctrine. I believe in the importance of theology. I have spent a lot of my life studying it. The older I get, the more I realize that the moment theology and doctrine causes people to feel like, I can’t stand rooted in the simple Gospel and hold it up for the people to see and be on mission with him, is the moment we have to say, stop. No, no, no. The foundation is simple faith in the simple Gospel. If you have that, you can be on mission with Jesus with power.

Here’s what I want you to do. Here’s my challenge to you this week. Two parts. Part A, claim your identity in Christ. Claim your identity in Christ. Claim your identity in Christ by doing this. Spend some time with God this week where you write down the insecurities you are facing. The insecurities that say well, I can’t be on mission with Jesus because I don’t get it. I don’t understand that stuff. I don’t know what those words mean, I say stop. I say to you, do you have simple faith in the simple Gospel? If the answer is yes, you can be on mission with Jesus with power, right here, right now today. Everything Jesus promised us is ours through simple faith in the what? In the simple Gospel.

All of those conversations are great. Theology is great. Theology provides protective lanes to make sure we are going in the right direction, to make sure we are on mission Jesus. I think theology is important, but the moment theology begins to make people feel like, I can’t be on mission with Jesus because I don’t get it. I don’t understand that stuff. I don’t know what those words mean, I say stop. I say to you, do you have simple faith in the simple Gospel? If the answer is yes, you can be on mission with Jesus with power, right here, right now today. Everything Jesus promised us is ours through simple faith in the what? In the simple Gospel. Everything else is gravy. Everything else is gravy.

Okay? Claim your identity. You are a child of God by simple faith in the simple Gospel. So claim your identity. Secondly, I want you to proclaim your identity. Proclaim your identity as a child of God through the faith of the Gospel to somebody else this week. Grab a hold of it, hold it up to somebody. Tell them, hey, I’m a follower of Jesus because I believe he died for my sins and rose again, and I put my trust in him. You are like, no, no, no. I have to unpack a whole bunch of stuff. No, you don’t. Proclaim your identity in Christ. Claim it. Proclaim it. See what God does. Yeah, it might lead to some questions you can’t answer, but you know what? You can find answers. Somebody asks you a question you don’t know the answer to, you say, yeah, I don’t know about that. Here’s what I know. Jesus died for my sins. He rose from the dead. I put my trust in him. He changed my life. God will get you answers you need.

Claim your identity and proclaim that identity. Everything Jesus promised us is ours through simple faith in the simple -- we have everything we need to be on mission with Jesus in the world, so let’s do it. Let’s pray.

Lord, thank you for making it simple. Thank you that salvation, freedom from our sin, and eternal life that begins now and goes through eternity, it’s ours through simple faith in the simple Gospel. Lord, build in us a resistance to lies that try to take us off of that foundation and say, you can’t be on mission because you don’t know the answer to this, or you don’t have this experience, or you don’t have this thing, or whatever it is. Lord, thank you that you made it simple. Would you build in us a resistance to anything that tries to take us off mission with You by claiming that the Gospel is not enough. We know that it is. We thank you.
Lord, we ask for Your forgiveness for the ways that we have not been on mission with You because we somehow felt like the Gospel wasn't enough. Would You forgive us for that? Would You give us the courage to claim our identity in Christ and also to proclaim that to the world. Give us the courage to do that this week. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you will continue in an attitude of prayer, right where you are, if you are a follower of Jesus, would you begin praying for the people around you who may not know Jesus? For people watching online at our campuses? I believe in all of our campuses right now, there are some people that the light went on today. The simple light of the Gospel came on. It's shining bright. You know, that's it. That's what I have been hoping for. That's what I have been longing for, to know that I can be forgiven, and I can be free and I can be part of God's family simply by trusting in what Jesus did on the cross, and you have never understood it was that simple, and for the first time the light has come on and you are going, what good news that is.

It is good news. God loves you so much, so deeply. He sent His own Son to take your place on the cross, to die to pay for your sins. But that's not the end of the story. He rose from the dead, and he offers you new life and forgiveness if you will just trust him in simple faith. If that's you, and you are ready to receive that really good news by faith, would you just slip your hand up? If you are watching online, just click the button below me. If you are watching on Facebook live, just say, I'm ready. Wherever you are just say this to Jesus: Jesus, I know I have done wrong, and I'm sorry. Thank you for dying in my place. I believe you rose from the dead. You offer me forgiveness and new life. Thank you for making it so simple. I'm ready to accept it. Jesus, I put my trust in you right now. I receive forgiveness. I receive new life. Thank you for making me a child of God. I'm yours -- for now and forever. Amen.

Can we just celebrate those who put their faith in the simple Gospel today and joined our family?