

Trusting Jesus

By Chad Blake

So you know they say that given a long enough timeline, preachers preach one sermon; that each preacher has a theme that they find a way to incorporate into any sermon they preach regardless of what the text is. And I was thinking about that actually over the last few weeks, I was like well I mean I haven't preached that many sermons, so I wonder what my theme would be. And I started thinking about it, and I think it would be trust. Trust. Trusting Jesus. Trusting God and why is that? And I think it's because I'm preaching to myself. Trust is a hard thing. Trust is hard. Trust is difficult. So this morning we're going to talk about trust.

Trust is assured reliance on the character ability, strength or truth of someone or something. That's what truth is. And we believe that we can trust Jesus. We can put our trust in Jesus; we can put our trust in God. Trust involves two dimensions, though. It's both the perceptual and the behavioral that truth is something in our head, but truth is also something we live out. Perceiving someone as trustworthy does not constitute trust. Likewise, engaging in risk taking behavior doesn't constitute trust. But trust is this inner play between the two. Trust is both the head and the experience. That's what trust is. Trust is all encompassing.

Trust doesn't come easy. If you're alive today, we are the most marketed, pitched, sold to, lied to, advertised to generations that have ever existed. Everyone's always pitching something. We live in a skeptical culture. It wasn't that long ago where FDR was in a wheelchair and no one seemed to mind, no one talked about it, no one used it as a thing to diminish his character or who he was. And now we live in a world where in this last presidential election, they were trying to subpoena health records for both candidates. We live in a world where our politicians; the default is that they're lying to us and that they need to prove that we can trust them.

We live in this post Watergate, TMZ culture, celebrity secrets, particularly bad with the Christian in movies. You know what I mean, like that Christian character in movies who's always the weirdo, always the odd one for some reason in Hollywood movies. You look at them and you go I don't even know anyone like that. Why do they always portray Christians that way?

But at the same time, we're built for trust. There's something inside us where we latch on to trusting people, even people we don't know. Recently I was in San Francisco with my dad on a trip, and we're walking down the pier, and these people are jumping up super high in the air, over the water, strapped into something. I'm like wow, those people are trusting some 17-year-old that they've strapped him in just right. There's something in us where we so easily trust people, yet at the

same time, we have so much distrust and it causes this anxiety, it causes this thing inside us as we continue to move through life.

But this is the foundation of what I want to say, that God loves you. God loves you. Can you trust that? Do you trust that? That God loves you. If you hear nothing else I say today, God loves you just as you are. There's nothing any of us can do, nothing, absolutely nothing any of us can do to make God love us more or to make God love us less. God loves us. That is the truth that we can trust.

Hannah read for us a passage from 1st John today, chapter 4, starting at verse 13. It says this: "this is how we know that we live in Him and He in us. He has given us of His spirit. And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent His son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God." And hear this last verse: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." We know and rely on the love God has for us. Do we? Do we? Do we trust God? What does know and rely mean? What does know and believe mean? What does know and trust mean? It's about intimacy. It's about experience. Do we know about Jesus or do we know Jesus. It's this moving from the head to the heart. It's a combination of these things that come together to form a trusting relationship in God.

For the Jewish reader, we hear trust, we hear these words know and rely and we think okay, yes, that's head knowledge, but for the first

century Jew, it was so much more than that. It was this whole body experience, knowing and relying and trusting.

I said earlier that when I was going to seminary, actually a lot of people warned me not to. A lot of people said oh, do you really want to do that? And I said well yes, of course I do. I want to go to seminary. And why were so many people worried about that? It's because in their experience, they had known so many people who had had a 15-inch gap. A 15-inch gap between the heart and the head that we can become so knowledge based that we lose the experience and the relationship and the intimacy of Jesus, but it's both. It's combining both things together.

One Dutch theologian says "Christianity is not a message which has to be believed." Think about that. "Christianity is not a message that has to be believed. But it is an experience of faith that becomes a message." It's an experience of faith that becomes a message. It's the difference between a fan and a friend. Are we a fan of Jesus or are we a friend of Jesus? Fans know all sorts of facts, right? Fans know when someone was born, they know when they wrote their first book, they know what movies they've starred in, they know all these different things about a person that they've most likely never met.

I have a friend who could tell you every single best picture movie that's ever won in the Oscars, and most years, every movie that was nominated, I think. Where is that in your head up there? He's a fan of movies. So are we a fan of Jesus? Well what's the difference between a

fan and a friend? A friend might not know all of those facts. A friend might not know all the little details that a fan might know, but a friend knows what's more important. A friend knows the character. A friend knows how you're going to respond. A friend knows how you're going to react. A friend knows what you're going to say. A friend knows who you are. We should be friends with Jesus.

Knowing certain people allows you to trust them with very important tasks that you wouldn't just give to anybody. And when we talk about following Jesus and giving Jesus our life, it enables this element of trust that encompasses everything. It encompasses the kinds of people we are. It encompasses how we react to one another. Today we're taking a big step talking about two churches coming together, trusting one another. Trust is such an important point in our discipleship. It involves relationship.

Jesus models it for us. Jesus knows the Father. We see Jesus retreating from His ministry to just spend time and intimacy with God alone. It's how He recharges. He pulls away from the crowd and He spends time with Jesus. Are we spending enough time with Jesus to know Him? Are we spending enough time with Jesus to trust Him?

Jesus goes so far as to trust God on the cross. You read the passion narrative and you see Jesus struggling with what God the Father is asking Him to do. But you see this reckless abandon to just trust in God, to just trusting His Father, to trusting His plan. We need to know

and trust and rely upon Jesus the same way that He does with the Father.

Knowledge leads to trust. So faith rises from personal experience and knowledge. Faith is this thing, this element in our lives where we've encountered something and we now have faith in it. And faith is the courage to accept acceptance. Now that's a weird phrase. To accept acceptance. To self accept who you are. This is such an important topic in today's world. We live in a world that people are tormented by anxiety, by feeling like they haven't measured up, like I'm not good enough. Even now, as we're talking about this love that God has for you, I know some of you in this room are thinking, but Chad, you don't know. You don't know what I did yesterday. You don't know the thoughts I have. You don't know my upbringing. You don't know what happened. There is no way God could love me like you're saying.

But the call of the Christian life is one of acceptance. Faith is the courage to accept who you are, accepting that Jesus loves me just as I am. What a powerful thing for us to grasp. It changes everything. That Jesus loves me just as I am. Any form of self rejection: I don't look good enough, I'm not smart enough, I sin too much, I do this, I do that. There's no way. Any form of self rejection is a sign that we don't trust Jesus. Leaning in to trusting who Jesus is.

I think scripture lays out a formula for building trust: its faith plus hope. Faith plus hope. Faith arises from personal experience of Jesus is

Lord. Hope is the reliance on the promise of Jesus accompanied by an expectation; an expectation of fulfillment.

And we see this all throughout scripture, but one of the stories we see it in is the story in Luke of the Centurion and his servant who's dying. And the Centurion's servant, he mixes this combination of faith and hope. And he says that I'm not even worthy to have you under my roof. Just say the words and my servant will be healed. And how does Jesus respond? I love how Eugene Peterson says it in the message: "Jesus addressed the accompanying crowds, 'I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust anywhere in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know about God and how He works.'" The very people who are supposed to know about God and how He works.

Man, when I read that today, I think of my own story. Where is my trust in Jesus? How is my trust in Jesus being lived out in my life? The very people who know about God and how He works. Is my trust on display? Am I living a life of trust for all to see? Am I living the kind of life that people say I want that trust in God?

Unwavering trust is a rare and precious thing. It demands a degree of courage that borders on heroic. It doesn't always mean that you get what you want.

As we're preparing to have our little baby, its weeks if not days away. I know. I looked at Hillary this morning and I said babe, don't go into labor. It doesn't always mean we get what we want. And Hillary's

been reminding me of this. She's like babe, you can't be the weak one. You can't be the weak one. You can't be the one that always gives in. I know. It's going to be hard.

But you know children don't always get what they want because parents know what is best. And so the child might.. I hope my child grows up trusting me, that whether he gets what he wants or not, that he trusts the fact that I know what's best. So living in trust doesn't always mean we get what we want. Living in trust doesn't always mean we'll get clarity. Believe me, I'm not promising you clarity. I'm not saying oh, if we just lean into trusting God more, all the puzzle pieces of life will fall into place. Oh, I wish that were so. It's not. Trust is not about clarity.

One of my absolute favorite stories and Bobby has told this before, as well, is the story of the famous professor and ethicist, John Cavanaugh. He was worn out, he was trying to figure out what was next in his life. He took a sabbatical from teaching and he went to be with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. One of his very first days there, Mother Teresa comes up to him and says 'John, I'm so glad you're here. Is there anything I can do for you?' And he says 'actually Mother Teresa, you can. You can pray for me. You can pray for clarity.' And I can only imagine what this looked like having Mother Teresa snap back at him and say 'no! I will not do that!' 'Well why? It seems like clarity is something you've always had.' She said 'no. I've never had clarity. But what I've had is trust. So John, I will pray that you learn to trust God.'

Sometimes we crave clarity so much that we eliminate the risk; in life we eliminate the risk of trust. Oh man, those moments in life where we're thinking okay, God lead me, God give me clarity, God what do you want me to do? And so we just crave that clarity so much that we just remove any element of risk of stepping out and doing something in faith. Stepping out and doing something knowing that Jesus is right beside us.

The way of trust is a movement into obscurity into the undefined, into ambiguity. It means I can live worry free in the fog of life, knowing whose hand I'm holding on to. It's what trust is.

I was thinking about one of my favorite sermon illustrations today that has to do with trust, and I know I'm getting close to fatherhood because I started to like tear up thinking about it. There's a story of a dad who's fishing with his two boys on a dock. And the dad, and I can definitely see myself in this position, is getting very into the fishing and concentrating on what's happening and where the lures are and all this stuff, and the two boy's kind of wander off. The older brother gets distracted and loses sight of his younger brother, and the next thing everyone hears is a kerplow. The water is eight feet deep. Young boy sinks into the murky water. The dad goes diving in head first after his son. He gets there and he finds his son just clenched on, holding on tight to the pylon on the dock. He pries his fingers off of the dock and he gets him out of the water, and after everyone re-gathers themselves and they figure out what's going on, he looks at his son and he says, 'what in the

world were you doing? Why weren't you flailing about?' Little boy looks back at his dad and says, 'just waiting on you, dad. Just waiting on you.' What a beautiful story that is.

Can we have that kind of trust in God, that in the chaos of life, when our life might feel like its falling apart. Maybe we've lost our job, some sort of relationship has been broken. We don't know where to turn. Do we have the kind of trust to just sit there and just wait on God? Or do we go through life at a million miles an hour? Do we try to just get it behind us and just keep moving forward? Are we the kind of people who are just grabbing onto that dock and say I'm just waiting on you, dad. I'm just waiting on you.

As we experience God, we begin to trust. If we don't trust God, it's probably because we're not experiencing enough of Him. Like I said, we're just living life at such a crazy pace. There's just one thing after another. What does it look like to be the kind of people that slow down? Slow down. Spend time with God. Spend time learning what it means to lean into trust.

We serve an incredible God. I was sitting in the pew thinking about a story from scripture that just shows how amazing our God is and how intimately He knows us and wants to know us. Luke tells us that He knows the number of hairs on our head. For some of us, that's a few more hairs than others, right? But God knows each and every one of them. God knows who we are. In the Sermon on the Mount, it talks

about the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and how God takes care of them. How much more does He care for us? This is the kind of God that we love. This is the kind of God we can trust.

We're starting to approach to Easter. We're in that phase where Easter is ramping up. And we think about the greatest story ever told. That God sent His son to die for us. Man, talk about a story that's starting to take on a whole lot of new meaning. That God's love for us is so profound. He loves us just as we are. There's not a lot of loves like that that exist. Hopefully we experience it with our parents but I'm not naïve enough to know that not all of us did. Hopefully we experience it with our spouse, but not all of us do. That kind of love that cannot be earned. The kind of love that cannot be taken away. God's love for us is incredible.

I heard one of my favorite authors of all time, Brennan Manning, he talks a lot about trust. He was giving a way for the congregation to really understand God's love, and as a pastor, we meet with lots of people and we sit and hear all sorts of stories of people, and people longing to experience God. I was meeting with someone who just said I just so desperately want God to reveal Himself to me. I'm crying out God. I don't know if I can believe, and I just want God to be evident in my life. And my heart breaks hearing that.

So just for a minute, put yourself.. this is the only time you should do this.. put yourself in God's shoes. Pretend you're God for a minute,

right? Pretend you are the God of the universe; the God who created all. And you have one of your creations looking to you, longing for you, crying out to you, wanting to be in relationship with you, wanting relationship, wanting intimacy. What does your heart tell you? Your heart should be getting warm. Your heart should say yes, I want to be in relationship with you. Take whatever you're feeling and multiply it exponentially and you'll start to get the grasp, just the minute grasp of the kind of love that God has for you. God's love is so much bigger than we could ever imagine. Safety is a barrier to trusting God.

You know many of us live a pretty cush life. We live in the United States. Many of us can walk to our fridge or our pantry at any time of the day and make something to eat. If we were dependant and needing food and not knowing where our next meal would come from, trusting God might be a little bit easier. But in our comfort, in our safety it becomes easy to just kind of not have to think about that.

You also can't will trust. You can't will it to happen. We talk a lot here about willpower and training versus trying, the call of the Christian life is not just to try harder. That's not what I'm talking about here. If you think my message is this – I got to try harder to trust God, you're not going to do it. You can't will trust to happen. You need courage. You need courage. You need to run into trust. Recognizing you're afraid of something doesn't always help, right?

I think about all the things in my life that I was afraid of, and just because I recognized that I'm afraid, it doesn't always make me not afraid anymore, right? Courage is what you do when you're still afraid. Courage is what you do when you recognize you're afraid and you still move on. Trust takes courage. It's hard. It's hard to say Lord, I trust you with everything. Lord, I trust that you love me just as I am.

What would it mean to take a courageous step to experience God? How many of us are following just on paper? How many of us are following just on facts? Step into the reality. Step into the experience. Step into a relationship of trust and watch what God will do.

Would you pray with me? Father, oh how we long to trust you as Jesus trusted you, as Jesus shows us the example. Into your hands we entrust our bodies, our minds, our spirits, and this entire day, morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Whatever you want from us, we want from us. We're falling into you and trusting in you in the midst of our life. Into your heart we entrust our hearts. In whatever form they come, distracted, insecure, uncertain, into you we abandon ourselves to Jesus our Lord, amen.