



Sermon – 08/13/2023

Brian McCormack

### **Verses Covered**

*Psalm 89:14*

*Revelation 1:4 – 6*

*Amos 5:21 – 24*

*Genesis 18:17 – 18*

*Micah 6:8*

Well, it's a real joy for me to introduce my friend Brian McCormack as our guest preacher today. If you haven't yet met Brian, he's the new director at Breakaway. He just moved back to Texas after serving for more than a decade as the lead pastor of Reach Church in Seattle, Washington. He grew up in The Woodlands and went on to play college basketball. And my only claim to fame right now with Brian is we played basketball together once and I beat him. One on one. It's true. Now, before you get too impressed, it was a mini-hoop basketball game at my house where we're playing knockout. So, he didn't really get to use his six-foot nine-inch frame to his advantage but I'm going to take the win whenever I can get it, right? And so, we're, Brian, we're just thrilled to have you here. We love Breakaway and what's happening there. Will y'all join me in giving him a warm Central welcome to the stage this morning.

Oh man. He's ain't lyin'. I got beat fair and square. Fair and square. Well howdy. How we doing? Okay? Good to see you, my goodness. Honored to be here. And thank you for that warm welcome. It means a ton. Uh also my wife and one of my kiddos is here. Uh Emily, my wife is is right back here. Can you guys make her feel welcome as well? There you go. We have, we have five children. I grew up an only child and I have five kids now. So, I, you need to pray for your boy every single day. Uh what an incredible time that is. I think we have a picture of all of the whole crew here if you want to get get a glimpse. That's a recent picture of all five. And yeah, we are we're here. We just got to Bryan/College Station back in the Spring around March. And I will say this, that Aggie hospitality is underrated, not overrated. This place has been absolutely incredible and thank you for being a part of that culture. And there are people in this room who have made us feel like family really really quickly even if they had no mercy on me in Nerf Hoop Knockout Basketball. So, like like your pastor said, I grew up in the Woodlands. I cut my teeth in youth ministry. Had a 13-year assignment from the Lord to plant a church in our apartment, living room in Seattle, Washington which we saw God bless and grow and multiply in ways we could never have expected. And we just felt like the Lord was preparing us for a new assignment. We did not know what that was going to be. We invited our church to pray with us. For what that

sending might look like. And God saw fit to bring us back to Texas and to give us this incredible opportunity to be an incredible community and to be trusted with a legacy ministry. Uh Breakaway is is a miracle. If you are not familiar with it. I feel like most of you in this room know what it is. You might not know how intimate this church's connection is to Breakaway. So, what happens in Reed Arena at 9 PM on Tuesday nights when thousands of students gather there. There was a season when Breakaway was not this established, incredibly well-resourced thing. It was just something that God was breathing on in a miraculous way. It was this church. It was this church that served as the home for breakaway. And in terms of business, you were a terrible landlord. You you charged zero rent for a couple years because you believed in what was happening here. You ordained our founder, Greg Matte, in ministry. Uh the the realness of this family tie cannot be overstated. So, on behalf of Breakaway as a whole, on behalf of thousands of students that aren't going to be aware of that connection when they walk in that door for the first time, thank you on behalf of all of them. You are making an incredible, profound impact. So, thank you so much for that.

I love your pastor. How about that for a segway? Uh I love your pastor. I respect him so much and I feel connected to him that is honestly not congruent with how long I've known him or how much time I've gotten with him. But I would categorize him as a friend already. He's someone I have called on occasion for no reason. You know, that's a friend, right? Uh you just, you just call, "Hey, what are you, what are you doing? What's going on?" Uh and he's already in that category. Uh one of my family's first meals in Bryan/College Station was at the Bethancourt's house eating Double Dave's pizza rolls. Can I get an amen? Yeah, that is good food and that is good company right off the bat. Uh you are in good hands in this place. So, I love your pastor and that means I love your church. I love your church and I hope you do as well. I hope you do as well. And when I say love, I mean the kind of love that's marked by commitment. Not just affection, although that's good as well. Uh but if you hopefully immediately responded, "Yes, Brian. Of course, we love our church." I think my question would be why. Would be why. I hope that on your list of answers, and it's okay if there's, man, I I love the way that the Spirit moves during worship or I love the way that the Bible is preached faithfully and exegetically. Or I love the way that we think about people outside of this community. Whatever those things may be, I hope that the mission resonates with you. Oh, I love Central's mission. I love Central's mission. Uh if you go to that website, it confronts you immediately. That if you're going to roll with us, this is what we're about. Every generation reaching the next generation. Yes, please. Sign me up for that. Sign me up for that. I will say this, that any compelling mission or vision is essentially not enough though. You typically need more than a mission or a vision to turn good intentions into actual impact. And so, what I want to put before us here is just this assertion that values matter a whole lot. In light of our mission, what do we prioritize? What are we passionate about? You see, values often serve as a bridge. They serve as a bridge between purpose and practice. They serve as a bridge from identity and activity. Who we are and who we claim to be and what we actually do. Values tend to be the bridge for those things. And sometimes the business world can be helpful to us in just fleshing out a concept. So, how about this? I'm going to read a couple value sets and see if you can guess the organization they're attached to. Uh the first one is, warrior spirit, servant's heart, fun-loving attitude, wow our customers. Yeah, I wouldn't expect you to get that one. That's Southwest Airlines. I don't know if you've flown Southwest Airlines but it's open seating as in wow. This is mayhem. Wow. I am being wowed as a customer. Uh this is kind of crazy. This is total mayhem. How about this one? Leadership by example. Daring to be different. Togetherness and enthusiasm. Accepting and delegating responsibility. I wouldn't expect you to

get this one either. That's Ikea. That's Ikea. Now, if they had, if they had included something about being an inescapable maze in their values, that might help as well. If you never been to Ikea, ask a friend. In fact, if one of your friends is missing, they might be at Ikea. You might want to make a call. Alright, this one y'all I kind of feel like the next two, you have a chance and this one is probably your best one. Excellence, integrity, leadership, loyalty, respect, selfless service. Come on somebody. Oh, my word. 80% of the congregation is like, got you. Yes. Texas A&M University. Uh I love em. I love em and I'm already all in y'all. And this is the last one. I'm a sports guy. So, it's a sports organization. There's your huge clue. Their vision is to build a winning tradition on a foundation of trust, integrity, and excellence and those are their three values; trust, integrity, and excellence. What sports team is that? It was not football. It's baseball. It's the Houston Astros. Now, let's talk about this for a second. You're already laughing so I ain't gotta explain it too much. I first used this illustration in the suburbs of Houston about two or three years ago and they weren't laughing yet. It was a little too soon to call out the disconnect. Ask a friend at lunch if you're not quite sure what we're talking about.

But y'all, what about you? What about you? Do you have values? Do you have stated clear values? I would say that this is the perfect time to start thinking about this. That whether you're a college student or not, that whether or not you have children going back to school or not, there's a natural reset happening in terms of like what is the way we're going to live our lives on purpose. Values are all about intentionality. Do you have them yet? Have you taken the time to write some down for your family, for your marriage, for yourself? And if you're honest, in their absence, if you do not have those yet, are you feeling the absence of that bridge to get from who you claim to be? And in fact, who you very well might be into a reality where you're living out that identity through your activity day by day. Maximizing God's fruitfulness in your life. Is it time to use some values to build a bridge? My wife and I have had seasons where we've realized we want that for our family, desperately and this is honestly, if you pray for us, this has been a ton of transition. We've been living out of suitcases since March. Our new home will be ready in about three weeks. We could not be more excited for that. Transitions are really hard times to keep your rhythms, right? To keep those expressions of who you are going. And so we'll be, we will be revisiting these in the coming days and weeks. But a couple years ago, we put on paper that we wanted our vision to be as follows: The McCormick family exists to be a joyful household that gathers all kinds of people to share the Gospel, help the hurting, and fight injustice together with us. That's what we wanted to exist for. Our values in light of that were Jesus first, fun is a spiritual discipline, sustainable pace, missional urgency, all nations, and then generosity of time, talent, and treasure. I'm excited to get back to that with you baby as soon as possible. Um but that is where we've been. What again, what about you? What about your life? What about your family? What about your marriage? You as an individual. So, it begs the question, what is life supposed to be about? If my values, my passions, set the trajectory for my actions, my words, what am I supposed to be passionate about? What needs to get written down on that piece of paper as I try to hammer out my values? I think a fitting question in light of that question is this, what is God most passionate about? Should not His passions influence ours. Should not His values influence ours. What does he want us to be passionate about? There's plenty of right answers to that question. Plenty of them. His His glory, His holiness, plenty of things like that. But I want to boldly put forward a central piece of God's heart that has been inspiring and guiding me these last few years in ways I had not expected.

One of the reading plans I will cycle in and out of from year to year, it's called Professor Horner's Bible Reading System. It's on the Bible app if you're ever curious. If you're looking for something more robust that keeps you in every different part of Scripture at once. It's ten chapters a day which feels totally overwhelming. And it's actually not. You learn to speed read without skimming and you see thematic threads. You see values popping up in the Torah, in the wisdom literature, minor prophets, major prophets, letters, Gospels, all the way through Scripture. In the following few verses that I'll use in you know the next 20ish minutes, the following few verses were all popping up on the same day. God just saw fit in His word to highlight this to me. It's something I enjoy sharing with friends like you. The verse, if there's only one, that you're going to pay attention to, remember, write down is simply this. Psalm 89:14.

<sup>14</sup>Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; loving kindness truth go before you.

So, we're not doing a big passage today which gives me permission to read that again. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; righteousness and justice. Y'all when I hear throne language anywhere in Scripture, my brain goes straight to Isaiah 6. The first six verses of Isaiah 6. This vision that Isaiah gets in the year that King Uzziah died. I saw the Lord and he paints this picture of what he sees. It's this enormous throne. He in this vision has been transported to the throne room. It's talking about the robe of filling the temple and he's talking about these majestic, enormous creatures declaring the holiness of God. That throne that is more enormous and overwhelming than anything we could ever imagine. That's what's being alluded to here in Psalm 89. That throne where the King of Kings, we know to be Jesus Christ, sits, ruler of the universe. That throne, according to Psalm 89, has a foundation. That throne rests upon something. And what does it rest upon? Righteousness and justice. Y'all when I see these two words together in Scripture, alarms start going off in my head. Neon lights start flashing because these two words are so important throughout Scripture especially throughout the Old Testament. These words are *tsedekah* and *mishpat*. *Tsedekah* and *mishpat*. *Tsedekah* means righteousness. *Mishpat* means justice. I don't really get into teaching words in their original languages just to flex and try to, yeah, I have been to school. But if you're going to know some Hebrew words. These are these are three straight from this, from this passage I would recommend you know. So, repeat after me. *Tsedekah*. That's righteousness. Say, *mishpat*. That's justice and one more. Say, *hesed*. Loving kindness, steadfast love, loyal love, right there next to those foundational terms. So, I'm reading that, having these epiphanies, right? And I jump over in that reading plan to Revelation 1. I'll read this for you. Four to Six. It says,

<sup>4</sup>John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, (you're hyperlinking back to what we just read. That same Isaiah 6 throne.) <sup>5</sup>and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and released us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup>and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

And everybody said together, amen. Alright, y'all. In the King James Version or the New King James Version, it actually interprets these verses, this one specific phrase, it says that he hath made us kings and priests. And I think that that's actually a little bit off. I think that this translation, the amplified, other commentators get this right, that He has made us, he has formed us into His

kingdom, into a kingdom, as His subjects, not as kings ourselves, in this particular verse, in this particular context. So, whatever His kingdom is about, whatever the foundation is His throne is built upon, we're supposed to have lives built upon that same throne. We're supposed to further His kingdom with the way we think, act, love, serve, sacrifice, etcetera, etcetera. That's right. *Tsedekah*; righteousness, *mishpat*; justice, are the foundation and we're supposed to be the kingdom. Equally passionate about those foundational things. But is this a stretch? Does God really want us focused on these things and if so, how badly? The next passage that day, I'm not messing, I'm not making this up. I was in Amos chapter 5, that same day, verses 21 to 24. God's loving but stern rebuke to His people through His prophet. He says,

<sup>21</sup>“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. <sup>22</sup>Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fattlings. <sup>23</sup>Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. <sup>24</sup>But let justice (*mishpat*) roll down like waters, and righteousness (*tsedekah*) like an ever-flowing stream.

Y'all, these people are in the right place at the right time. Seemingly doing the right things. And still, the absence of the foundational values of God in their hearts and in their lives and in their actions, made those good things unacceptable before, before the Lord. Foundational things. Let justice roll down like waters. Let righteousness flow like an ever flowing stream. Friends, God wants justice and righteousness for His people, from His people, flowing to others. That's what He wants. And here's what we need to realize. We better know what they are. We better know what those things are. And not what the dictionary says they are or what we think they are, or what culture says they are, or are not, but what does God say those things are? When we think of justice in our contemporary context. We often default to someone who has done a great wrong, receiving what they perceive to be an appropriate consequence for their wrongdoing. In the commentary, you know, outside the court, the courthouse, the interview after a criminal has gotten, you know, their punishment handed down to them, a common quote, justice has been done, right? A wrong has been made right. And that is partially true. And this concept isn't Scripture but it should not be our first thought when Scripture uses the word translated justice. Biblical justice, that combination of words is really important all the time but especially in this cultural moment. Biblical justice trends heavily not towards those who have done wrong receiving condemnation. But towards those who have been wronged, receiving compassion. Receiving compassion, the sojourner, the refugee, the marginalized, the impoverished, the hungry. That's what biblical justice, particularly in the Old Testament, is oriented towards. You take your hands off the steering wheel on the highway of biblical justice and it naturally pulls towards those people, the forgotten, the marginalized, those in need of a tangible experience with the love of God. We often use justice to discuss the power, the beauty, the genius, and the scandal of the cross; and we should. Listen to me. The reality of sin, God's holiness, the need for atonement, God's justice being satisfied while we receive grace. That's the beauty and the genius of the cross. That might be where our head goes when we hear justice in a church context, in a theological context, and that's okay, it should. But that's not necessarily, in fact, that's not what is in view, the majority of time, Scripture itself employs the word justice. Did I say that clearly? The justice of God, beautifully satisfied on the cross. true, stamp, yes, central, okay? Wildly important. But in these Old Testament context, something else is being pointed to when that word is used. So, as we seek clarity on these two conjoined righteousness and justice, *tsedekah* and *mishpat*. Quickly, just what are they not? And this is my biggest point on what they are not. Righteousness is not passive and justice is not

hypothetical. What do I mean? What I mean by that is if I say, hey, are you righteous? Are you righteous? Some of you will think, “Oh well, I haven't done this. I haven't looked at this. I haven't clicked on this. I haven't embarked, you know, participated in this behavior that's unacceptable and therefore, yes, I'm feeling righteous.” A valid line of thought. Again, but again, that's not what the heart of righteousness is in the Old Testament. It's not about passivity. It's not about, what have I withdrawn from. It's actually about what have you engaged in. What have you engaged in? This is huge. Um Pastor Philip just took you guys through Genesis. Look at Genesis 18. This is God. He's considering what to do with Sodom and Gomorrah and he's thinking about what he's going to do with Abraham.

<sup>17</sup>The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do with Sodom and Gomorrah, <sup>18</sup>since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD, HOW, by doing righteousness and justice,

Y'all, righteousness is something you do. It is a positive thing you do towards others for the glory of God. You bring righteousness to bear where righteousness is lacking. You bring justice to bear. You make things right as much as possible in the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of God through what you do. So, you are counted righteous in this context, not by just stepping back from the evil stuff, but by stepping into the good and doing good where good can be done. Abraham's exemplary, faithful obedience happens at the intersection of doing *tsedekah* and doing righteousness, *mishpat*, right? That's what's happening here. One more verse for you. I kid you not, on the same day, Micah 6:8.

<sup>8</sup>He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you to do justice, to love kindness (*hesed*), and to walk humbly with your God?

Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly. Verb. Verb. Verb. These are things we need to do on behalf of the God who loves us. Whose throne sits on the foundation of these very values. So my friends, I told you that there were three words I need you to know. *Tsedekah*, *mishpat*, we have addressed. *Hesed*, not so much. *Hesed* not so much. And its righteousness and justice are the foundation. What do we do about the fact that in our world, righteousness and justice is not always as sturdy as it's supposed to be for that throne? The word *hesed* come in to address that problem.

When I was doing my doctoral work, an incredible leader named Dr. Thomas came in and went on this rant about this word *hesed*. He, I just I'm just going to recall some of his highlights because this was a quick moment for me. I was captivated by his definition, explanation, illumination of how beautiful this word is. Why it's worthy of being one of the few Hebrew words you commit to memory. He said, “*Hesed*, loving kindness, steadfast love, grace, mercy, goodness, to be faithful in a, to a relationship, to act in loyal, loving ways toward a person. Used 240 times in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. One of the most important terms in theology and ethics. Its strength, its steadfastness, the love of God, all smashed into one. This word means that God is so strong, His love can't be broken. Can't be broken at all. He has strength to love regardless of human behavior, not obligation or generosity. It means He loves not because He has to but because He wants to. In Hebrew culture, someone does *hesed*, shows *hesed*, keeps *hesed*. God does *hesed*

in concrete acts of redemption and fulfillment of God's promises and then he just said this, God is *hesed*. He is loyal love and then he said this one letter. God's *hesed* is so *hesed* that ultimately it's beyond God's covenant promises. It will not be abandoned even when the human partner has been unfaithful. Loyal love. This is a big word. This is a robust word. This is a word larger than the English translation we have. Loving kindness. Right? It's worth the deep dive. And guess where he took us right after that explanation. Psalm 89. Right back to the throne. He points out that the *hesed* is right there in that phrase next to the foundational words of righteousness and justice. Things being the way they're supposed to be in God's kingdom. Let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When that's not working, *hesed* is right there. He said that rabbis, the rabbis of old, would often teach that God's throne, that Psalm 89, Isaiah 6 throne, had a wobble and it was the *hesed* of God that was that would be slid under the wobbling leg to remove the wobble and create stability. The loving kindness of God. His above and beyond love towards us is what removes the wobble. That's the truth y'all. That's what's crazy and here's the thing we have to connect. On this side of the cross, we are God's *hesed*. The cross itself, the Gospel itself, is God recognizing the wobble in humanity because of sin. God recognizing the wobble in your life because of sin done against you and the sins you've committed. And the Gospel itself is the steadfast, loving kind, loving kindness, infinitely faithful love of God coming and saying, I will fix the wobble through the offering of My Son. I will slide that under the wobbly leg of humanity and of your life, my friend. And now, as recipients of *hesed*, of that loyal love, who have experienced the stabilizing love of God that has removed the wobble from our lives, the natural call upon us is to be God's *hesed*. However, we see it. Where is the wobble in the world? Where is the wobble? That's really what the question becomes. And before I start with the out word, as we approach our conclusion here, I got a question for you. What in your life needs to be propped up by the *hesed* of God? What feels wobbly? It might be past tense. It might be what that one person did to you long ago that you've never really brought to the light to God or to God's people. And despite your best efforts to act like everything's okay, there's always been that wobble in your faith, in your heart, in your head, in your life day to day. Maybe the *hesed* of God wants to come into your life and prop up what was done to you. Maybe it's something you did. You've never really been able to admit, confess. Yeah, I can't believe I did that thing. Last night, last week, couple decades ago, you've never let the forgiveness of God as an expression of the *hesed*, the loyal love of God come in and prop up that wobble through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What's wobbling in your life right now is you stare down another school year, as you stare down, another reset, another time to run in the Fall after the rest of the summer? What feels wobbly before you've taken a step in this season? Where's the wobble in your life? My friends, the good news I have for you today, the *hesed*, the loyal love of God wants to come and create stability in your life. So long as your life is built on God and what He cares about. Righteousness, justice and my friends, beyond just what's wobbling in your life. I think my final question for you is this, what in this community, in this county, in these cities; what in this community is wobbling and how will you, how will you Central, how will you be the *hesed* of God that props things up? How will you do that?

And I want to close with this as a as an interesting way to encourage you. Bruce Shelley wrote a book called Church History in Plain Language. And what he did for one particular chapter was study the most legitimate, robust, undeniable, supernatural moves of God in the history of the Christian church. A lot of them in the first couple centuries. But he wants to know, he wants to know, what does every unprecedented move of God have in common. That should make your ears perk up a little bit Central. Do you still pray audacious prayers like that? You still pray that for

these students? Do you still pray that for these generations that God might want to do something unprecedented? I hope you do. And this is what he found, Bruce Shelley. There are four things that every unprecedented move of God has in common. Number one, passion for the Gospel. Period. Devotion to the good news of God's loyal love that we call *hesed*. Passion for the Gospel. Number two, Gospel answers for big questions. The ability to apply God's loyal love to the lives of those around you. Gospel answers to the questions people are actually asking. Every move of God has had that. Number three, persecution. Shared hardship. Willingness to suffer together for God's *hesed*, knowing His *hesed*, His loyal love will be enough. And then lastly, this blew my mind. Every move of God, from the resurrection of Jesus to present tense. Fourth attribute, tangible acts of sacrificial love. Making God's *hesed* visible by doing righteousness and doing justice. And so my friends, as people that I believe are united in our desire to see God move that way and as we are all gathered in this room, in a place where God is proven for decades to be in the habit of bringing stability to the wobble in an individual's life, in a family's life, and in the community, shared life together through the good news of Jesus. We're back where we started. What will your values be? What will they be? What will they be?

Uh will you stand for a moment if you're able just so I can pray for you as we transition. I just want to say a blessing over you and I'll hand it back over to your pastor here who I trust so much. Central, listen to me. This is the three-fold blessing I have for you in light of these words. Number one, may you start this next season standing on the values by which you will live your very life. May you not go into this season unaware of what your values will be. May you have your values. May you know what they are. May they line up with God's values. And may you stand on them confidently. Live on purpose, Central. The time is too precious. The opportunity too great. The urgency too deep to not live with such intentionality. I'm counting on you. I'm counting on you. My second blessing for you is this. May those values you stand on echo the very heartbeat of the King you've pledged your allegiance to. The King has told you what His foundations are. He's told you what His throne rests upon. Righteousness, justice, loving kindness. So beautifully exemplified in the cross of Jesus and now offered to you to receive and to exemplify yourself. Thirdly and lastly, may your heart know more joy and your church see more fruit than ever before as you do so. May you stay close to the cross of Jesus. If you've never responded to that cross, that is the place where righteousness, justice, and loving kindness meet. This Jesus who lived the perfect life you could never live, died the death you deserved so that you don't have to die that death. Rose to new life so you could rise to new life as well and have abundant life together with the people to your right and to your left. My word, may those things ring true in you and become the anthem of your very soul in the season to come. And may you see more fruit than ever before as you do so, Central. Every generation reaching the next generation indeed. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Everybody said together, amen.

Thanks so much, y'all.