

Good morning. Now, listen, I was taking care of some other stuff, so I didn't hear Darren's explanation for the chairs. Was it sufficient? He didn't give you an explanation for it.

It was still sufficient. Well, if you have a question about the chairs, that was not a decision I made. So if you're really mad about it, do not direct it towards me. But I think Darren looked at the four door questions about the chairs, and he decided that this is one that he was going to keep walking through. And of course, the fifth door says you can always change it back.

And so maybe he'll do that. Maybe, maybe not. I kind of like it, though. There's a little cavity space right here that seems to be missing. Maybe I'll have Zach come up here into that area.

Zach loves it when he walks in late and I call him out. But Zach, we got a few little spots right here. You and Charlotte would be perfect in this spot right here. The problem is with the center aisle. It's a little harder to sort of sneak in.

You have to, like, walk across people. So if you want to make a note of that. Hey. Good morning, Charlotte. How are you?

Listen, I'm not even supposed to be up here this morning. Shawn asked me to play. I was perfectly excited about being on the band this morning. Alan Burris was going to preach this morning, and he calls last night and says, I'm not feeling good. I'm like, buddy, no, he's got Covid.

So, yeah, so, yeah, so get your shots. So I said, sure, I'm up for it. I love a good challenge. So this morning I'm up here, so don't judge me too harshly. The sermon that I'm about to preach is about 45%.

Alan's sermon that I tweaked to make it like something that sounds natural coming out of my head. So feel free to grade me. I have no emotional attachment yet to this, so I'm open to suggestions on this one. Anyway, I'm glad you're here. I'm apologizing because I feel really unprepared for what's going to happen next.

If you're visiting with us for the first time, I want you to take comfort in the fact that you're surrounded by people who love Jesus and trying to serve the community and just let your expectations for the sermon drift a little lower than normal. Are we good on that? Are we ready for that? Okay. Okay.

Heavenly father, we thank you for the opportunity to gather, to hear from your word, to be encouraged by your word. No Matter the messenger. Your word never fails to be effective. And it says it doesn't return void, meaning it always does what the scripture is supposed to do, which is challenge us and transform our lives. So Holy

Spirit, we give you permission to use the word this morning to speak into us, to challenge us, to maybe change our perceptions, our awareness of the world around us.

Strangers in this strange land that you've called us to be part of. In Jesus name, amen. When I was growing up, 1970 was a big year for us because we were introduced to the whole idea of the World Book in encyclopedias. Anyone grew up with World Book Encyclopedias. Now you may have had the funk and wag notes.

We weren't allowed to use that kind of language in our house. So we got the World Book Encyclopedias. They were. It was this set right here. Now it wasn't exactly the set.

Those go for about \$250 right now. If you've got a set at home, that's what they're worth. Don't throw them out or sell them for \$250. I love those. It was my first introduction, I think, to the bigger world around me.

In fact, when dad came home one day and said, I've accepted, accepted a position in Guam, like Guam. I've never even heard of that place. What do you do? Well, you go, oh, A, B, C, D, E, F, G. I'm going to pull open the World Book Encyclopedia.

And there was a picture, a black and white picture of Guam. The way they represented Guam was a. Was a palm frond hut on stilts. And I remember there was a water buffalo in the picture. And so when he said, we're moving to Guam, I'm like, I really love indoor plumbing.

I don't see how this is going to work. Of course, when you get to Guam, you realize a gan near the capital city, big high rise hotels. It is amazing. I'm not sure where World Book got their picture, but I don't think I ever saw water buffalo the entire time I was in Guam. In any case, that was my first introduction to the wider world around me.

People were brown instead of Springville White. Springville White is whiter than Bedford White. I'll just tell you. We're really white down there and Guam wasn't. Guam was like new people and new foods.

I had something called soy sauce. Have you ever heard of that? I grew up with white rice. My grandmother made it. Butter, sugar and a little milk.

It was a breakfast food. And all of a sudden I go to Guam and they're pouring this black liquid on the rice. I'm like, what are they doing to my beloved rice? And then you taste it and go, oh, umami has been missing from my life. And umami come into my belly.

I like a little soy sauce. But it was a completely different culture. We went to a fiesta. I'm spending a lot of time in the introduction

because I'm not really sure I'm going to finish the sermon. We went to the.

We went to a fiesta. Now, a fiesta was a new thing. It approximates a family gathering, but it's involving everyone. The entire town shows up for this. People from your work, people that heard about it in China show up at this thing and they serve something.

Pam will remember this because I think she saw it before I did. They serve something called fruit bat. So yes, the last word of that is true. It is a bat. They stretch its wings and pin it out and then they float it on top of, like, this punch liquid in a bowl.

Pam, do you remember this? Where is Pam? Yeah, she's on her head. She's giving an amen. Sometimes Pam will say, that is not how that happened at all.

But in this instance, she's like, yeah, you're telling the truth this time. So fruit bat. There's nothing like looking at a family gathering and seeing a bat floating in red juice to make you realize, I am a stranger in a strange land. Now, later, I would get to travel to other, less foreign parts. I would go to England.

But even in England, it's different. When they drive on the opposite side of the road, there's nothing so terrifying as being in the driver's seat of a car and seeing a semi truck seemingly barreling straight at you in your lane mentally. But then you realize, oh, no, no, no, I'm in the. We're both in our correct lanes. I'm just not in the left lane.

I'm in the right lane or the left lane and the right. See, this is how it gets. And you're confused about most of the time. But even then, as Alan would say, cookies are biscuits. In England, biscuits are what they call scones or scones.

We say in Indiana scones, but scones in England. The hood of the truck is called the bonnet. The trunk is called the boot. Very good. French fries are chips, and chips are called crisps.

You guys are on it.

But all those things make you go, I don't feel like I'm in Kansas anymore. I'm a stranger in a strange land. We've been at Mexico family camp A couple of times, and you're sleeping in tents and you're drinking out of water bottles because you can't drink the water that's there. That was pretty familiar. We're around English speakers.

But then you would go into these places where people very, very poor people are living, and you realize, oh, I'm different here. Not only is the color of my skin different, I'm engaging not just with a

different ethnic culture, not even just a different national culture. They play soccer instead of basketball there. But also with a completely different economic culture. And I tell you, that can be a big deal for Americans to go into a place where the.

Where it's completely different. In Mexico, you feel real rich. You go to Singapore and you look around, you go, oh, I'm real poor here. In this culture, being in a different economic culture can make you feel like a stranger in a strange land. Allen's talked about the that he served in New Zealand.

And he says, one day I went to church and my roommate stayed at home because he was sick. And people asked, where's Paul? I said, he's under the weather. And they all started cracking up. And he's like, what?

He goes here under the weather means you're drunk as a skunk. For Alan, that was a reminder that he's a stranger in a strange land. We lived in Germany for a while. Again, a different language that was hard to learn, New ways of doing things, new neighbors. We had a neighbor there that had very high standards for the way she kept her yard and excessively high standards for the way she expected me to keep my yard.

Many conversations her in German language that I did not understand. Schnitten, schnitten. She would say, schnitten, schnitten, schnell. Fast. Cut it fast.

Like, we have to get the bus. Taking trains. No one takes a train to school here in Lawrence County. And city buses, that would be our way. We would get to school there.

In Germany, I was a stranger in a strange land. Now, why do I say this? Because in scripture, there's an ongoing theme of home, but mostly it's about us not being in our real home. It's about foreigners, strangers living in a foreign land. Strangers living in a strange land, surrounded by reminders that we are not yet where we are supposed to be.

Now, we've been talking about this for about three weeks in this series on the kingdom we prayed. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Today we're looking at on earth as it is in heaven, because the truth is, we inhabit Both places. Now, Peter acknowledges this. Peter is writing to the church living in the Roman Empire under Nero.

He reminds him that they are God's chosen people called out. This is. This is the Greek word ekklesia, which is where we get the idea of the church. We're called out out of the culture that they live in. They're chosen to be holy.

They're set apart from the culture around them, and they're to be light in a dark world, sharing their goodness with others and carefully influencing the culture around them, all the while remembering that they are not at home. Why is this important? Because otherwise they might get real comfortable the place they live, and that's contrary to God's will. So Peter says this. Dear friends, in chapter 2, verse 11 says, Dear friends, I warn you as temporary residents and foreigners to keep away from the worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

Not only are you living in a different place, you're living in enemy territory. So be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. So how do we do this? Well, Peter tells them to live respectfully with the culture. He tells them to submit to the local government.

That was important. When you live in another country, you need to be aware that their rules are different than your rules at home. It says, respect the people you live around and respect the culture, but don't forget that it's not yours because you belong to a different place now. That was then, this is now, and nothing has changed in 2000 years. No matter where we live as Christians, we are still and always citizens of heaven.

The kingdom of Heaven is our home. We live now wherever we live, whether it's in Germany or Guam or Mexico or Bedford, Indiana. We live as ambassadors of the king and that country. And that means that we still, no matter where we live and no matter wonder what government we live in, we still ultimately answer to his rule and his rules. His rule and his rules.

So what is that rule? What is the rule of the kingdom and what are the rules of the kingdom? Well, basically, it narrows down and boils down to this one. Love sounds really wishy washy. I know some of you guys are like, no, no, no, I want something.

Give me some. Give me some beef. Where's the beef in this? And the beef is this Love. That's it.

We love God and we love our neighbors. Jesus said, this is it. You do these and you got this thing sewn up. This is it. You love God and you love your neighbors.

Here's how Paul writes to the Corinthians about this, he says Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone. So that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they'll live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

So here's what this looks like. So now we stop evaluating others from a merely human point of view. At one time, we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view, but how differently we know Him. Now, this means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone and a new life has begun.

When we. When we enter into this relationship with Christ, when we become in Jesus, we become new things. We are not the old thing, we are a new thing. We become the elect of God. We become the chosen of God when we choose Jesus.

Now, all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task now of reconciling all those around us, reconciling people to Him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ ambassadors.

There's that word again. God is making his appeal through us like an ambassador does. He speaks for the country he is representing. God is making his appeal through us. And what does that appeal come back to?

God. Come back to God. For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sins so that we could be made right with God through Christ. Now let's go back to the very beginning. What is this rule that compels us, that compels our message, that compels our actions?

Well, it is the rule of love. It controls us. It compels us. Just as love compelled Jesus to say no to his own will. Do you remember that in the garden?

Do you remember Jesus saying no to his own human will? He said, not my will, but thine. If it be possible, Lord, take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my human will, but your will. Now, what compelled Jesus to lay aside the human will and say yes to God's will?

It was love. He knew that our sins separated us from a holy God. And we could not bridge that distance on our own. No amount of good stuff, no amount of perfect church attendance, no amount of excellent giving could bridge the distance between us and a holy, holy God. Human effort cannot do that.

Only God can. So even though it was hard and even though he had to put aside his human flesh and his human desires to stay true to the divine in him. The God in him who was saying, this is what needs to be done. He said, yes, nevertheless, not my will, but Thine. He was glad to do so.

Love compelled him because he wants us in relationship with him. He

agreed to this thing in the first place, didn't he? God so loved the world that he sent Jesus. Jesus was not forced, but the Godhead agreed among themselves. This is what is needed to bring man back to God.

And Jesus says, here am I. I will do this. He wants us in a relationship with him. So notice some of the things Paul says. He says, we believe that Christ died for all died and was raised.

All of this is a gift that God gives us, who brought us back to himself through Christ. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sins, so that we could be made right with God through Christ, through Jesus, we have been and we can be reconciled to God, where we go from objects of God's holy wrath and from being separated from him to being his precious children, his beloved sons and daughters. We're not just citizens of this new kingdom. We are sons and daughters.

We are princes and princesses of this kingdom. Jesus pays the price. He did it. When we understand the offer of eternal life, the gift of salvation, the reconciliation with God, the that results in peace and joy and confidence, we embrace it through faith. We embody that faith in baptism.

We now become controlled by the Holy Spirit. And we live out this rule of law. It compels us to live for God. We become new people with a new view and a new attitude towards life and the world and people around us. We no longer live for ourselves.

Nevertheless, not my will, we say, but Thine, we say, I've been crucified with Christ. I no longer live. But Christ lives in me, in the life I live, in the body. I live by faith in the Son of God. So this life that you see me living out here, it's really lived because of my faith in God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

That's what Galatians tells us. So when Christ lives in us and through us, we become his ambassadors together. We become the Church, become His embassy. We've talked about that picture a lot over the last couple of weeks. We become this outpost of heaven where the kingdom's rule and reign is exhibited in us and through us.

Right Here at, among us and where we live. Out this prayer of Jesus that he taught us. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This, thy will be done becomes our mission. Now that Jesus seems to indicate that this mission is something we can only fulfill if we remain strangers in a strange land.

You see, it doesn't get fulfilled if he takes us out of the world and leaves this place just to kind of figure it out. Out. He says, no, no, no, that's not how it's going to work. I need them to stay. In fact,

this is what he prays.

He says this when he's praying to the Father. He says, I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, just the opposite. But I want you to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth.

Teach them of your word, which is truth. And just as you sent me into the world, I'm sending them into this world. I gave myself as a holy sacrifice for them so that they can be made holy by your truth. It's John 17. So what does this new life look like?

How should we live? Well, again, these are. These are pictures that we painted through the last couple of weeks. And if you're curious, you can look back and watch them. But remember those folks back in Jeremiah?

Remember these people, the Israelites who got caught up in idolatry? They. They neglected worship. They neglected to prioritize God. And God gave them warning after warning and they sort of just ignored it.

They indulged in the pagan practices of the culture around them. They refused to repent. They refused to return to God. And God said, okay, I'm going to have to do something. If you've got kids, you know about consequences.

I know. My boys know consequences. This is the most hated word at 1318 15th St. Consequences. But life has consequences, doesn't it?

We do something and we have to deal with what comes after. And God says, you have to deal with the consequences. And the consequences are this. The Babylonians are going to come in and they're going to really rough up you and your country. In fact, the temple was destroyed, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and those Israelites were taken in captivity and marched a long, long, long, long, long way by foot, not by plane to Babylon.

Captives and strangers in a strange land. And God says, when you get there, here's what I want you to do. I want you to gripe a lot. I want you to just mope around, maybe criticize the culture. Be real harsh on everyone.

Complain about everything. That will be great. That will really represent me. Well, maybe isolate. Just keep to yourself.

Just live in general depression. Be miserable and make everyone around you miserable. That's what I want you to do when you live in this strange land that I'm going to send you to. Now you all are sort of chuckling because you know that's exactly not what God told him to do. Instead, here's what it says in Jeremiah 29.

We know this. We know that verse. I have plans for you, says the lord, plans. You know that one? Well, let's just go up a little bit earlier and see what he says about how you need to live in the culture that God puts you in, even though it's an enemy territory.

He says, this is what the Lord of heaven's armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives. He is exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem. God sent them there. God sent them there. Jesus says, I want them to stay in this place.

Don't take them out of this place. Not yet. They need to stay in this place. Just as you sent the Babylonian, the Israelites into captivity in Babylon. I want them to stay right here in this weird place.

He says this in verse five, captives build homes. Plan to stay, plant your gardens, eat the food they produce.

That's at least a year. Then we're going to be here a year. If he tells us to plant a garden, then we're going to be here at least a couple of garden seasons. And he does this. He says, I want you to marry.

I want you to have children. Oh, wait, we're not talking about one year. We're not talking about a growing season. We're talking about, like, kids growing up and getting married and having children. And then more than this, he goes, I want you to work for the peace and prosperity of Babylon.

What? This is the enemy, Lord. What are you. What are you saying? No, I want you to work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile.

I want you to pray. I want you to pray for this city. Pray for this culture that God's put you in. Pray for its welfare, because its welfare will determine your welfare. If Bedford does good, Tim does good.

So, Tim, pray for Bedford.

This is what the Lord says. You will be in Babylon for 70 years. What if God told you that you were going to be in a miserable place for 70 years and you just had to suck it up and deal with it?

70 years, you're going to be here. Then I will come And I will do for you all the good things I have promised. And I will bring you home again. This is the part that we all love. Because I know the plans that I have for you.

And they are good plans. They are plans for good and not for disaster.

They're plans that involve hope and a future. And when it's time, I will gather you from all of the nations where I sent you, and I will bring you home again to your own land. We are strangers in a strange land.

And we will be here until the Lord calls us home again. In the meantime, we live in hope. We stand on God's promise. We enjoy and build on the life God gives us. And we enjoy it.

Did you catch that? Enjoy the life God gives you in this strange place he's put you. We're not home yet.

Jesus lived in this place that God sent him. Jesus lived in this place where the Father sent him with grace and truth, peace, joy, confidence and hope. He calls us to live the same way, keeping our eyes fixed on him. And if we do, we can bring the kingdom of heaven on earth. We can bring the future into the present.

We can bring God's will, it is in heaven, to our way of life on earth right here and now. So our prayer is, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Now I'm going to leave you with a couple of challenges. 2. Are you in a right relationship with God?

Are you living in a place where God is king? Because if you're not living where God is king, then you're not going to experience his kingdom. That's just. That's just the truth. So if you're not living in a place where God is king, I'm going to encourage you to surrender your life to Jesus, be baptized into his family.

Begin living as a stranger in a strange land. It's going to be better. You're going to actually enjoy life better living as a stranger in a strange land when you're under the authority and rule of the King of love. So if you need help doing that, if you need some assistance walking through what that looks like, I want you to talk to me. Talk to someone here, talk to Darren.

He did a great job with these chairs. He will do an even better job. Explain to you how to put your trust in Jesus now. If you belong to Christ, how are you using your influence here in this strange place, in this strange land? We all have people around us who are still living as subjects, in need of a king, as people in need of a King, you're surrounded by people like that.

How are you using your influence to help them know Jesus better? We want to help you do that as well. We're going to share in communion here in just a moment. Now, with the chairs the way they are, again, the rule of unexpected consequences. We set these chairs up and they look really cool, but it's going to make communion a little bit different this morning.

I'm going to let the communion people figure that out. But you might give them a little bit of grace as they try to sort out how that's going to work. But all of this reminds me that I am not. I am not here forever. I don't know about you, but I'm going to.

I feel I turned 58 in one month. December 19th. Put it on your calendars, and my body feels it. It's not just the result of a lot of gravity working on my system right now. It's the fact that I'm getting older and my body is saying it's ready to be glorified any moment, but we're not there yet.

Paul tells us, however, that we always live with our eyes cast into that future. Paul says in Second Corinthians, we are fully confident. We are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. We know that at some point in time we will. We will return back to our country and we'll step feet on this, the turf that is ours by rights, and maybe we'll fall and kiss the ground, and we'll say, lord Jesus, thank you for bringing us home, home, home at last.

But until then, while my body doesn't need to be reminded, my heart sometimes does. And so this is a moment where we get to look at our hearts and say, lord, am I longing for your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven? Am I truly surrendered in every aspect to seeing your will come as it is in heaven? Christ suffered for our sins so that we would have a place to call home.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love for us.

Your love brought those of us who were far from God. The scriptures use such an interesting term. There maybe enemies of God, maybe just strangers to God, but we were far from you regardless. And you said, I want you to be part of my kingdom. I want you to be part of this new thing, this new place that I'm creating, and I'm creating it for people like you.

In fact, I'm going to make it for you, Lord. I'm excited about that place. I forget sometimes to live that way. So today, as we take the cup and the bread, those reminders of how much you loved us and your willingness to die for us, I pray that as we take the bread and the cup, we would be reminded of the power of living for you in this strange place, surrounded by strange and even unhealthy cultures and customs. Remind us that though we live here, we are not part of it, but we pray for it.

And we use our influence every way we can, pursuing and living the law of love. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

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