

Groaning

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[0:00] Well, let's do a quick review. our minds. So let me ask you, what were some of the marks of a Jesus-focused life, of Jesus-focused living? How would that flesh itself out in concrete, everyday situations? We mentioned a few things last week. Can anyone remember those or one of those? Dale? In reverence.

And what do we mean by that? The fear of the Lord. Okay. Right. There's no condemnation in Christ Jesus, so there's no fear of condemnation.

But God, nevertheless, is a consuming fire. And so we, as creatures, need to stand in fear of him, even as we love him and respect him and honor him. It's not a simple emotion that we're talking about.

It's not a simple attitude. It's complicated, and it's mixed together with love and respect. And that's the attitude that we need to have for Christ Jesus. He's our Savior. He's our brother, but he's also the judge, the ruling king. And so we need to live our lives out of, in fear of him.

What else did we say? There was the fear of the Lord. Two other things. You're a quiet group this morning. On obedience. That's right. And we basically said that if we're going to live a Jesus-focused life, we have to have Jesus' commands coming into our minds. And we have to live in constant reflection of what he has told us. And so we're not just living sort of a general obedient life. We're living in light of specific commands that he has told us about marriage, about raising children, about loving our enemies, about all sorts of things. Our lives are to be in constant reflection of what he has said. And so we obey what Jesus has told us to do. And that, you know, that's even almost cliché in our world, in the Christian world, that, yeah, you obey Jesus.

[3:02] But Jesus-focused living is actually having that planted in your minds. And so you're going into a situation and you're asking yourself, what do I need to do to obey in this situation? And what passages are relevant for me in this situation? And then there was a third thing. Do you remember what it was?

Ed? Love. It's an argument. Right. You're loving the Lord. The Lord owns your heart. He owns your love and your affection.

Because at the bottom, how you react in every situation is determined by who owns the love of your heart. And so we want to give our hearts and commitment and devotion and all their affection to the Lord Jesus. And that's how you live a Jesus-focused life.

So we fear him. We obey him. We love him. And if you remember, that kind of life is based on remembering something, remembering several things. It's a life of thinking about what God has done for us. What are some of the things that we are to be always remembering? That's the basis of living a Jesus-focused life. Do you remember some of the things? We mentioned two, and we talked about two at great length, but there was a total of four. Yes, Kathy.

Exactly. What he has done for us in Christ Jesus. Basically remembering, whatever we are, we are by the grace of God. We are by the grace of Jesus Christ what we are. We aren't anything special in and of ourselves, but everything that we are, everything that we have obtained, who we are, our identity, is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ because of what he has done for us. What were some of the, another thing that we were supposed to remember if we're going to live a Jesus-focused life?

[4:58] Roger. Roger. Okay. Everything that I own or everything that I possess, it belongs to Jesus. So what does that mean? How is that going to work itself out by remembering that?

You know, you don't want to hold on to anything too tightly that's not ours to begin with. We're just working with everything and thinking that's what we want to use it for his life. Right. So often we act like we own the things that we have. And the Lord says, the heavens are mine and the earth is mine.

Everything's mine. I'll let you use some of my things for some time, but I have the right to take it from you anytime I want. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. And so that should change our attitude towards the things that we are possessing at this time. They are not to be used for our little kingdom.

They are to be used for Jesus and his big kingdom because they belong to him. There are a couple other things. One was that Jesus is the Lord of lords and the God of gods. He is the ultimate sovereign.

And so he rules over all things. And that is a truth that needs to penetrate the way we live our lives. We have no reason to fear because he's the Lord of lords and no other gods, no other idols can rival him because he's supreme overall. And then the fourth one was the Lord has mercy on the alien, the orphan. He loves justice. And so our lives are to be a reflection of that. We are to carry ourselves in the way that we live in light of the fact that Jesus cares for the weak and those who are oppressed. And so our lives should be lived in the same way that Jesus lived, which was relieving oppression, saving people from those kind of things.

[7:06] Well, Paul Tripp begins this chapter, which is entitled Groaning. He begins this chapter with a story. And throughout the chapter, he constantly refers back to the story. And so rather than me coming up with a story of my own, which would be like a shadow of his story and reinventing the wheel and making my job a lot harder, I'm just going to read his story. It's rather long, but as we're reading it, as I'm reading it, I want you to ask yourself, what's wrong with this picture? Okay?

And not so much that, but what's wrong with it? And then how does this story intersect with my life, with the way I live? And what are some of the similarities that I see in myself?

As she stood on the porch and watched the kids waiting for the bus for the first day of school, it hit her. She had everything she had ever wanted. Three days earlier, she and Brent had come home with the children from a wonderful week at the shore. The garden behind their 150-year-old farmhouse was laden with vegetables ready to be harvested. Brent had a great job, was a fairly skilled handyman around the house, and on top of all that was Kat's best friend. The single block downtown in the small town they lived in was something out of a 1950s movie, and they lived only 30 miles from the big city where they could get anything they could ever want or need and all the art and culture that they could ever want to enjoy. Kat had a close circle of women friends, all of whom were approximately her age and who had young children like her own. She loved the Tuesday play day each week while the kids romped in someone's yard. She and her friends would talk and laugh and share for what seemed like hours, and as she stood there and looked at Josh, Evan, and Cassie, they seemed like the perfect family. The profit they had made from their well-located condo in the city had not only enabled them to buy the farmhouse of their dreams, but to completely restore the interior as well. The wraparound porch with its white wicker furniture had become an evening retreat whenever the weather was right, and she did love the garden.

In the city, she had barely been able to keep a couple of houseplants alive. Now they were actually eating vegetables that they had grown, and as the bus drove away, Kat, now lost in her thoughts, sat down on one of the wicker chairs. Her mind went to Brent. She remembered the night she met him, that is, if you call bumping into someone and spilling your soda on them a meeting.

She loved his sense of humor that night, so she agreed to see him again. Kat had recently had her heart broken and wasn't really interested in a relationship, but she agreed to go out with Brent because he made her laugh. Their relationship wasn't perfect, but Kat knew what some of her friends were going through in their marriages, and she knew she had a lot to be thankful for.

[10:17] She smiled as she thought of Brent standing in the front of the mirror in his silly kangaroo boxers, shaving as fast as he could so he could throw on his clothes and head to his office in the city.

She laughed as she anticipated that he would hit the porch soon. Lukewarm coffee in hand, tie askew, already late as usual. As she quickly kissed Brent goodbye, she was thankful that she had found his niche and was experiencing real success in his job. The call from the prayer chain made her mind go to the small town church they had decided to make their own. The building just off the town square was something out of a postcard. Although the pastor wasn't the best communicator, he was very warm and the church was so conveniently located for them. She had fun organizing the nursery and painting and decorating the room that had new life each Sunday as it was filled with the sounds of infants and young mothers. Kat and Brent had never attended a church the small, but the family atmosphere had more than compensated for the lack of programs and activities that the big

city church had offered. She could see the steeple from her porch and when the kids got older, they would probably join the town tradition of walking to church on Sunday. Suddenly Kat remembered that she had a lot to do before meeting Brent in the city for supper and a play. She grabbed her teacup and went inside to deal with the gotta get to school quickly mess that was always left in the children's wake as they ran out the door each morning.

Even with a day of work in front of her, Kat thought how much she loved her life. So let's talk about Kat for a minute. What do you think of her? What do you think of her life and her attitude? What do you guys think?

Her attitude seems fine, but is it for the right reasons would be my question. I mean, is she truly doing this in joy before the Lord or is she satisfying her own? Okay. That's good.

What else? What do you guys think of her and her life? There. She's very blessed. That's true, isn't it?

[12:37] No denying that. Jeanette. Jeanette. Okay. Yeah.

Do you think she would say that she's thankful? Okay. She probably feels thankful, right? Chuck? Her joy is wrapped up in her complete thanks and it's one of the only moments she's in joy.

Yeah. She has very earthbound treasures, that's for sure. Even though she has a very ideal life and probably something that a lot of us would probably want to experience.

If we were being honest. I mean, Derek? She hasn't suffered. Okay. Okay. We don't know that. But she's not suffering so much in this picture.

And Chuck's probably right that the minute she started to suffer, life wouldn't be so grand after all.

Do you ever come to points in your life where you're like, wow, things are going really well.

[13:35] This is good. I like this. Does that ever happen to you guys? Sometimes. It happens to me. I think it. I hope it happens to you where you're thankful that what God has done.

Is it good for her to be thankful for all the things that she has? Right. How about the things that she does have? Are those good things?

Yeah. 1 Timothy 4.4. Everything that God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

So everything Kat is enjoying, her husband and her children and her house and her garden and her church and everything, those are all very good gifts. They've all been consecrated. They've all been made holy by God's word.

God has said these are good. And by prayer, when she receives them with thanksgiving, they are good. But there's something very wrong with the whole scene.

[14:42] It's not so much, it is true that her heart is wrapped up in her treasures a lot. There's something missing in her life.

That a big kingdom life has. Do you know what it is? Suffering? Right.

Groaning? She, this is what Tripp says. From a distance, Kat and Brent's life looks godly. They aren't overtly breaking any of God's commands.

They have forged a fairly healthy relationship. They have involved themselves in their church. They seek to teach their children the things of the Lord. They're not in constant conflict or deep debt.

They have cordial relationships with their neighbors. Yet there is something very wrong in the scene. Maybe what appears to be godly isn't so godly after all.

[15:39] Being godly is not just about committing a certain list of sins. It's also about finding fulfillment outside of God. The problem with Kat is that she is so satisfied.

She is so fulfilled. There's no groaning in her life. There's no discontent. Is there such a thing as holy discontentment? And the answer is yes.

So let me ask you. How can she be so satisfied in her life? What makes that possible for her to be so happy with what she has and what's going on?

What about her? Yes, Lou. Yeah, her main love is herself. And the way we've been talking about it is, you know, she's been building her little kingdom, hasn't she?

It's been about her. And so she's organized her life in her little kingdom. And so now she's shrunk her life to the size of her. And she is thrilled that her little kingdom and all those dreams are pretty much true.

[16:51] They've all come true. She sought her kingdom first. And her kingdom has pretty much come. And so she is happy. But Jesus-focused living will not allow us to be so easily satisfied.

Seeking first the kingdom of God in this age will always be marked by groaning. So turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8 and verse 22.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption.

As we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. So do you see the logic of this passage? We are supposed to be groaning.

[18:10] We are supposed to be dissatisfied because some of the things God has promised to us, some of the things that we are looking for have not yet come.

And Paul says, so we groan for those things. And if we're not groaning for them, there's something wrong with the way that we're living. So, look at that passage again.

What are some of the things that we are waiting for, that we don't have, and yet, if we wanted them, we'd be groaning? Chuck? A rich welcome?

We're not home yet, are we? And we're waiting to come home. What else? Freedom from the flesh? Freedom from sin? The redemption of our bodies?

Yeah. What else? Adoption of sons. Have we been adopted?

[19:14] Yes. But we're sort of like, we're still in the orphanage, aren't we? God's put his name on us, we're his children, but yet we're not in the family yet.

We're not at home yet. We're still away, and we're looking forward to the completion of our adoption. Adoption of sons. There's something else that we're participating in.

The whole world is groaning, and what's the whole world groaning for? It's at the very beginning. What's that? Love of self. What do you mean? No, I said we thought when God was being gone.

And we want to be redeemed from that. When you need to be redeemed from the love of God.

Yeah. What is this world waiting for?

The creation. Renewal. Recreation. We're living in a fallen world where the creation itself is groaning, longing to be renewed.

[20:22] So when your life is built on Jesus, when he's the center of your world, when you're seeking first his kingdom, then you are going to be groaning and longing for these things.

You're going to be longing for your adoption. You're going to be longing for a new sinless body. You're going to be longing for a new world where righteousness reigns. And you can't be satisfied with what you have.

Because what you have is not all of what God has promised. And so you're going to be groaning. And that's what Paul is saying. Well, Kat didn't groan.

Because she wasn't really living her in and out days of her life for God, for Jesus, and for his kingdom. She wasn't groaning because she was satisfied with what she had presently obtained.

And so let's just look at her satisfaction. And as we look at it, let's ask, what would seeking first the kingdom of God look like in response to that?

[21:31] So, first, what is the source of Kat's fulfillment? Chuck has already said, it's the physical pleasures of life. It's the good life. And so underneath the veneer of her faith, which I'm not saying is fake, it's just a thin layer of her faith, her fulfillment has little to do with God, as Jeanette said.

If you were to watch a videotape of her life, the things that she is satisfied in, the things that she was living for, you would see very little evidence that she is actually living for God and for his glory. Because if you are really living for God and his glory, there's always going to be a tension in your life. A tension between thankfulness. She has every reason to be thankful. And on the other side, it's going to be groaning.

Because we don't have all that God has promised. So she's thankful that she's a Christian. She's thankful for what God has done. But she's not really groaning for the work that's left undone.

She's not acting like someone who's in the act of childbirth. She's acting like she has all that she needs. All of her life is in front of her and the things that she can touch and the things that she can enjoy.

[22:45] And so she's satisfied with physical, earthly things. Even though her life is wrapped in a cover of Christianity.

And I'm not saying, like I said, I'm not saying that her faith is false. I'm just saying that it's shallow. So first, she finds her fulfillment in the physical blessings of the present life. Secondly, she is satisfied with the halfway done work of redemption. She is satisfied with the halfway done work of redemption. So if you take a video of her life, it wouldn't show someone who is zealous for holiness.

Someone who is longing to be holy, to be righteous. She is satisfied with what God has done with her. She's happy that she's a Christian. And she knows she's not perfect.

She wants to be perfect someday. But she doesn't want it that much. But what she has now, her present level of holiness is okay.

[23:51] And so she doesn't groan. And I don't know about you, but when I think about that, my shoes are getting kind of tight. Because there's a lot of times where I'm completely happy with my level of holiness.

There's a certain level of sin in my life that I will tolerate. Because no one's perfect. So we have it pretty good here.

Cat's just like us. And it's easy to be satisfied with things. It's easy to be satisfied with what God has given her so far.

But she doesn't want anything more than that. And she is satisfied with the halfway done work of redemption, not only in herself. She knows she's not perfect, but she's okay with that.

She's satisfied with the halfway done work of redemption in the world. So, you know, God is...

Jesus has come not to just save sinners.

[24:56] He's come to save the whole cosmos. The whole world. And it's not yet done. But Cat is okay with that. Sure, she's like everyone else.

She complains when politicians are corrupt. And she might shed a tear for an orphan in Africa. And she might have some troubling thoughts about what has happened in Haiti.

But she simply doesn't look at her life or the world with big kingdom eyes. She doesn't groan.

Because she's happy with the little world that she has.

Those things, orphans in Haiti and disease and poverty, they don't affect her little kingdom. And so, she can live with them.

And they're fine. She has a nice town to live in. She has the garden. She has a kind husband. She has kids that go to a nice school. But she doesn't know anything about Romans 8 kind of groaning.

[25:58] Where she looks out in the world and she wants it. She's so sad that it is the way it is. It's not a part of her life. Because she really, really doesn't love the world like God loved the world so much that he gave his only, one and only son.

That whoever would believe in him would not perish but have eternal life. She doesn't care about the world like God cares about the world. So, God loves the fatherless and the widow.

And he groans over this creation that is being destroyed by men and by sin. But Kat doesn't.

Because those things don't affect her little kingdom.

And so, she's fine with that. She isn't longing to end oppression. Because she's not oppressed. It doesn't matter to her. She has what she wants.

And so, she's satisfied. And you know, we're not just talking about the words that we say. Because if you were to ask Kat, she would say that she, she would agree with everything that we're saying.

[27:11] She would say that she wants to see oppression end and poverty end and all that. She would want to say that she wants to be holy and perfect.

But those are just the words of her mouth. Groaning is a heart response to what is going on in the world.

To what is going on in my own sinful self. It's a heart response. It's not just a mouth and words response. And so, we're talking about where our hearts are. Do those sad realities move you in the deepest places of your heart about how sinful you are?

And how really messed up this world is? Does that, do those things make you groan? Because big kingdom living is living with your heart humming and sympathy with God's heart.

And so, God delights in public justice. God delights in holiness. And if your heart isn't in sympathy with His, if it's not humming with Him, then you're living a little kingdom life.

[28:25] Whatever you say. So, Kat is fulfilled. She's satisfied with the physical things of her life. She's satisfied with the here and now world.

She's satisfied with the halfway done work of redemption inside of herself and out in the world. Those things are all okay. And third, she's satisfied with mutually satisfying casual community. Mutually satisfying casual community. So, you know, she liked talking with her friends and all that kind of thing. Those are good. She's happy with that.

Let me ask you, if you are in love with the little kingdom, if you are in love with self and what you want, then how do you see relationships?

What are relationships for? Doing good to yourself.

[29 : 25] What else can we say? What are they going to be characterized by? Are they going to be much work? No. Because the minute the work starts to come, the minute it starts to get intense, I'm out of here.

This isn't what I asked for. What part is God going to play in your relationship if you're happy with the little kingdom?

Very little, right? Because he's not the heartbeat of your heart, so he's not going to be the heartbeat of the relationship. So Kat has good, casual relationships with her friends at church.

So she goes to Bible study. And, you know, she does the nursery thing, and she goes to church, and she talks friendly with her neighbors. But all of her relationships never get below the casual. So her relationships are all about TV shows, and recipes, and her kids' lives, and football games, and soccer games, and politics.

[30 : 39] But deeper relationships, where you're focused on God, and what he is doing in a person's life, and what he's doing in my life, that's too much, that's too hard. That's too intense.

And, you know, I need my privacy. And I'm glad those people respect my privacy, that they're not always asking me personal questions. Now, is there anything wrong with TV shows, and games, and recipes, and all that stuff, and what your kids are doing?

No. But big kingdom living is more than that, isn't it? It's about what God is doing in this world, and about what God is doing in my life, in your life.

And so, we can't be so easily satisfied. See, the problem is not that we're too... The problem is that... Not that we're dissatisfied, but we're just too easily satisfied.

So, I go to church, and I hardly talk to anyone about what God is doing in my life, and I don't ask what God is doing in your life, and that is okay with me. And that shows you what kingdom you're living for.

[31 : 46] So, let me ask you. Do you come to church to build others up, or do you come to be built up? Do you come looking to see who you can give to, or do you look for what you can receive?

Do you come to church to pour your lives into other people? Or do you come to talk about TV shows, and what your kids did, and gadgets, and things like that?

Like I said, there's nothing wrong with talking about those things. But if that is the total, the totality of your conversation, there's a problem.

So, if you're living for God's kingdom, then you're going to long to see God work in people's lives.

Aren't you? You're going to look at a person, and you're going to say, I want you, Lord, to be working in that person's life. There's a problem here in their life, and God, you need to stand up and help.

[32 : 58] And so there's going to be this groaning, this intense desire for God to work, and God to act in the relationship. And you're going to be confronted, as you dive into relationships, with problems that you can't answer.

And so there's going to be this groaning for wisdom, and for help. As you want to help the other person, and as you want to see God's kingdom come in their lives, and in your life together, and in the church, there's going to be a groaning, because his kingdom hasn't come all the way.

Well, like I said earlier, when you live in the big kingdom, it's going to be marked by attention.

There's going to be deep, deep, glad, thankfulness for what God has done in your life, and what God is doing in this world, and the beautiful and good things that he's given you.

And on the other side, there's going to be daily groaning, because we don't have all that God has promised. And you know what?

If your lives are marked by both, thanksgiving and groaning, then you are going to be growing towards God, because as you thank God, as you're glad, and you're thankful in him, then your heart's going to be stretched out to him, and you're going to be growing in closeness to him.

[34:24] And it's going to keep you from living a selfish life, where you think, you know what? I've worked, and I deserve this. And so there's no room for thankfulness. But when you have thankfulness in there, then you're going to put works aside, and you're going to see grace in a whole new light, light, and your life is going to be marked by godly realities.

And as we groan, we're stretching out to God too. We're saying, God, I need you. I need you to stand up for righteousness in this situation.

I need you to do good in this relationship, in this situation, because I'm powerless. And so as we're groaning, our groans go up before God. And we're stretching out to him.

And so we're living for more than ourselves. We're not so concerned about ourselves and our lives. We're not enclosing our lives in a tight little box that's so dark and that's just all about us.

Well, there is a constant tension in the big kingdom, and we need both sides. We need thanksgiving, and we need groaning. And as we do both, then our lives become marked by the big kingdom, and we start to see God's kingdom come, and his will be done in our lives.

[35:45] We have about one minute. Is there any questions? Comments? Dick? Just a comment. It seems that she had a couple of spiritual security blankets that she was blaming to.

One was the steeple of the church. The fact that that was kind of her homing point. She knew where it was. She could see the steeple and not feel good. And the other was the anticipation of our tradition of walking the church.

Another thing that she would think is spiritual, but it's just simply her mission. That's very good.

That's very good. Because we don't have a steeple in this church, but we have a building, don't we? And we can make this church just a security blanket. Well, I go to this church and we do this, and we substitute a tradition for reality. Mickey? Another thing that I thought of is taking the book boxes and book burgers.

Whenever I get that out, I think that we have no idea in this country. Even if we are suffering, what it is like is having you with that.

[36:56] Right. We could talk about that a lot, couldn't we? We're basically living in the Disney world of the universe here. There.

I was thinking about relationships, mechanical relationships, and I thought of the scripture verse about iron sharpening. Iron, and the thing that I never used, you know, a tool to sharpen that's iron. That's worth. And it's hurt. And it's painful. It's high. And, you know, those are the relationships that the questions are concerned about.

And God used to shape us. So often, we're so afraid of offending somebody that we never know the richness of iron sharpening.

We're so afraid to offend people and we're also so afraid of being offended. I thought about asking this question and I didn't, but I thought I would like to see hands of people that would like to have more and better spiritual conversations.

[38:05] And I'm sure most people would raise their hand because we do all have a longing to go deeper with one another. and there's something that's keeping us from it.

And it's our own concerns, it's laziness, it's fear, it's pride. And we need the gospel in order to get past those things.

Because if we're not secure in who we are in Jesus Christ, then we can't be secure enough to have decent relationships with one another. And so the answer is not more willpower.

we need to see God's grace more in our lives. That's all the time we have. Thank you for your participation.