

With college football, back to school, and longer shadows, we are reminded that fall is in the air. One of the fun fall traditions where I used to live, besides Packer football, was tapping maple trees for sap to make maple syrup. It's a little early yet. The sap runs best on warm days after cold nights.

Think about the process of refining maple syrup. Maple trees are tapped with buckets hung under the taps and out drips the sap, which is thin and clear like water. On a good day, 50 trees will yield 30 to 40 gallons of sap, but it is essentially useless at this point, hardly tastes sweet at all.

Then as the buckets fill, they are emptied into large bins that sit over an open fire. The sap comes to a slow boil; and as it boils, its water content is reduced and its sugars are concentrated. Hours later, it has developed a rich flavor and golden-brown color, but it must be strained several times to remove impurities before being reheated. In the end, those 30-40 gallons of sap are reduced to one gallon of pure, delicious maple syrup, which is far better than any imitation maple-flavored grocery store syrup.

So it is when it comes to our relationship with Jesus Christ, our Savior. We start like raw, unfinished sap, which could have been tossed aside as worthless. But God knew what he could make of us. He saw that raw unfinished sap was worth it. He saw that something precious, sweet, and useful could come through a long and often painful refining process. This is our final week in our teaching series called "Worth It: Listening to the Voice that Matters."

Over the last five weeks, we have learned that we are created in the image of God and that God sought us, found us, and gave us a new identity in Christ. Now we will see that we are so worth it to him that he continues to perform miracles in us. That while on this journey as Christians, he uses his refining fires to transform us into something precious, sweet, and useful to Him. His long-term refining process is to turn us from sap to syrup. It is designed to bring forth pure genuine followers of Jesus.

We complete our Worth It series with one of the oddest miracles in the ministry of Jesus written about in the Gospel of Mark.

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" vv. 22-23

Bethsaida was a well-known fishing village on the north end of the sea of Galilee. It was where Peter, his brother Andrew, and Philip were from. Some friends interceded and brought their blind friend and begged

Jesus to heal him. He led the man out of the city, away from the people and the hustle and bustle. Jesus spits in his face and touches him. Isn't that exactly what we would do when confronted with someone who needs to be healed?

Now there was a belief in Jesus day that saliva had healing powers. Think about it today, if we prick our finger, what do we do? What I think to do is to put my finger in my mouth. But we know that in other times in Jesus' ministry, Jesus healed through his words, or through his words combined with touch. Actually, Jesus healed any way he wanted. But why this way? We're not told. The oddest part of this is not that Jesus spits in the man's face; it the question after he spits in his face.

We don't expect Jesus to ask the man if he could see anything. We expect him to make an authoritative, declarative statement like, "God has healed you!" Instead, Jesus asks the man, "Do you see anything? As if to ask, "Did the miracle work?" You'd think that if someone were capable of working miracles like Jesus was then He'd be the first to know if the miracle took.

He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." (v. 24)

The blind man can now see. I picture those walking talking trees from middle earth in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. But these people were not trees. They were people he could see but couldn't see clearly. It's almost like Jesus didn't get the miracle all the way right. So Jesus goes at it again.

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village." vv. 25-26

The second time Jesus fully healed the man. This begs the question. Why not go home right away? Jesus tells this man not to go home because the villagers didn't see Jesus clearly, and they would complicate his bigger plan. His path was not to be the Miracle Worker. They didn't clearly see Jesus' correct path.

Mark is the only gospel writer to record this story. And there is a point to this story, a deeper meaning that we have yet to see. I see trees when I try to figure out this story. The answer is found when we look at the whole of Mark's gospel. There are 16 chapters, and this story is right in the middle. In the first eight chapters, Mark is trying to answer one question. "Who is this man named Jesus?" In chapter one, he answers it when John the Baptist says, "He is the Messiah." He answers it when the Father declares, "He is my Son." He answers it when demons confront

him and say, "You are the Holy One of God." Over and over, Mark is attempting to answer the question, but none seem to get it.

You look further into Mark's Gospel, and the religious leaders say, "He serves the devil." There was one time when Jesus' family was embarrassed, wonders if he is insane, and tries to take him back home. And it seems that as we progress through the first eight chapters, the disciples did not see clearly.

In chapter four, he calmed the sea. In chapter six he fed 5000 people, walked on water, and after he fed 4000 more people the disciples were worried that they didn't have enough bread for the boat ride across the sea of Galilee. Jesus seemed frustrated that they were not able to see.

That is the context of this miracle. The disciples witnessed that this man couldn't fully see at first; people looked like trees. And then they saw that Jesus didn't give up. Jesus didn't stop until the job was finished. The disciples saw, but what they saw about Jesus at that point was like a tree. They didn't see clearly. God needed to work in their hearts. All they cared about at this point was getting more bread. They cared about who was going to be the greatest and sit closest to Jesus when he was to take the throne and rule in his kingdom.

The disciples needed to change. They needed to see clearly, but they didn't think they needed to change. Jesus saw them clearly, and he sees us clearly. He declares, "You are Worth It. You are so worth it that I am going to burn away the sap until you see me clearly."

Because We are Worth It, God Gives Us Spiritual Vision to see more clearly.

Through our blurred vision, we may see ourselves as having one problem to overcome. One bad habit to lick. God isn't just after improvement. Our new identity is so important to him that he doesn't stop paying attention to us. He is not just after our improvement. His spiritual vision for us is our transformation.

We do not want to feel lonely. Jesus' vision is to reorient us to the wonderful reality that we can live in authentic community on the Peninsula, and to see clearly how to interact with all people, from every background, both friends and strangers alike.

Through our blurred vision, we want God to heal us from one addiction. Jesus' vision is to reorient us to see clearly on how we are to interact with all substances, everything we consume.

Through our blurred vision, we are trying to figure out how to work fewer hours and make more money. Jesus' vision for us is to see that our new identity as children of God. It means we can be transformed to the point that nothing can compete with the pleasure of knowing Him.

We want to get above water on our finances; Jesus vision is to reorient our lives to earning, saving, and giving and to live generously, give joyfully, to be wise with debt and our things. We want to feel that we are effective parents, and Jesus wants to reorient us to see clearly to love our children the same way our Heavenly Father loves us. He wants us to administer both love and loving discipline, building into our children

God's kingdom values as a way to define success instead of our culture's values.

The disciples saw. But they still saw trees. Let's keep going in our story. Jesus continued probing the disciples so they might clearly see who he is.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets. But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. vv. 27-30

Bingo. Peter was getting it. Peter saw more clearly. What Peter was saying was that Jesus was the Promised one from Genesis 3:15. Jesus was the one to crush Satan's head. Jesus was the anointed prophet, the anointed priest, and the anointed king. Every good prophet, priest, or king in the Old Testament was simply a type of the one to come in Jesus. Jesus was the one they had been waiting for. It's as if a veil was lifted. He saw clearly. Or did he? But then Jesus begins to explain to them what being the Messiah entails?

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. vv. 31-32

This is the first time in Mark that Jesus connects his identity as Messiah with suffering. Jesus holds nothing back from them. Total victory and triumph weren't going to be easy. Mark answers the question for us. Who is Jesus? And look at Peter's response.

A minute ago, Peter was our hero; he seemed to see clearly. And just when you thought full transformation had happened for him, we see Peter rebuke Jesus. So, Peter is bold. He also shows some sensitivity too. It says, he took Jesus aside. He didn't want to rebuke Jesus in front of everybody. We don't know what Peter said in his rebuke, but it probably went something like this, "Jesus, look at me. Look at me and repeat after me. I am the Messiah. I am the Messiah, and I will not be defeated. I am Jesus, and I will not be killed. Enough of this sad, defeated self-talk. You are the Messiah. You are the man. Let's go bust some heads in Jerusalem!" Peter did this in private, not wanting to embarrass the King of Kings. Now look what happened next.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." v. 33

So, it is not a good day when Jesus calls you Satan. Jesus' rebuke was, "Peter, don't try to stop my path to save humankind from their sins." Peter saw, but he didn't see clearly. He was able to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" But he couldn't see clearly to answer the question, "What kind of Christ is He?"

Because We are Worth It, God Gives Us Spiritual Vision to See the Life Jesus Lived On The Way.

The phrase “on the way” is used back in verse 27 and Mark uses it nine more times through chapter 12. Jesus was on the way to accomplish the mission his Heavenly Father had set for him. The Messiah was on the way to Jerusalem to offer his life on a cross to atone for our sins.

I read this week that in the 1950s, Parker Brothers came out with a game for church families, called “Going to Jerusalem.” The playing pieces were not like those in the original game of Monopoly – a top hat, Scottie dog, or an iron. In “Going to Jerusalem,” a player got to be a “real” disciple. Each was represented by a little plastic man with a robe, a beard, some sandals, and a staff. Crazy, right?

In order to move across the board, players looked up answers to questions in a little black New Testament that was provided with the game. Players always started in Bethlehem, and then made stops at the Mount of Olives, Bethsaida, Capernaum, the stormy sea, Nazareth, and Bethany. If a player rolled the dice well, he or she went all the way to a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but no one ever got to the Crucifixion or Resurrection. There were no demons or angry Pharisees. No suffering. No mocking. No execution.

Players only made their way through the nice stories. It was a safe adventure, perfectly suited for a Christian family game night.

Why did Jesus say Peter’s attitude was satanic? Like Satan, it was his pride. Peter wanted to pursue more power and glory for himself, but that’s not where Jesus was headed. Jesus was headed for a cross, and if we want to follow Jesus, we trust. If we want to follow, we obey. We follow wherever he leads.

The next verse may not be suited for a Christian family game night.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. v. 34

I hope this preaching series helped you see your worth more clearly. But you are not there yet, and neither am I. God won’t stop with us until we see everything clearly.

Because We are Worth It, God Gives us Spiritual Vision to See the Life We are to Live as Followers of Christ on the Way.

Let’s see clearly today. Followers of Christ on the way must recognize the tight connection between the life Jesus lived and the life he calls His followers to live.

For each of us, there is more sap that God wants to burn away to make pure syrup. No imitation will do. God won’t stop with partial transformation. The call of discipleship is a call to follow Jesus all the way, on the way.

Now what is the end result of God burning away all the sap? To what end is God working? What are we being transformed into? I love the words of the Apostle Paul. Throughout this series, Paul has told us that we are worth it, but to go from sap to syrup seems flat out impossible. Paul encourages us with these words.

...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil. 1:6

For the last five weeks, we have heard the amazing things that God has done for us. So then aren’t we required to do something amazing for him? That’s human nature to think this way, but it’s not the answer. God starts by doing something amazing for me, and then he just keeps on doing amazing things for me.

God is working and will carry it on the way, all the way, till he brings it to completion. Jesus gave partial sight to the blind man and then didn’t tell him to fix the rest of his vision himself. Jesus touched the man again, and he touches us again and again and does miracles again and again while we are “on the way.” There are miracles in our past and miracles in our future as we surrender and follow Jesus.

So on our way toward transformation, it is God at work, and God never stops. But what is our part in all of this? We are not passive bystanders. In Philippians Paul wrote,

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed— not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Phil. 2:12-13

You have already been given the gift of salvation, the miracle of salvation, now act on the miracle. Trust! Obey! I contribute nothing to my gift of salvation, yet as I work it out, God is working his power, his power bought with His blood, his power placed in me at my salvation. His power to help me obey as I read and learn Scripture, pray, and live in community with others who care about what I care about.

Knowing this, what kind of attitude should we have? The word for fear in this verse does not mean terror or anxiety. The word translated fear means respect. Understand the awesome work that is going on. The greatest work is going on when we are growing, when we are being transformed to look more and more like Jesus. A healthy fear is the fear of disrespecting God by disobeying him. Trembling means humility. Understand our weakness and our need to surrender and let him lead everything in our lives. We should feel a sense of holy awe when we see that God has chosen to work in us so that as we trust and obey, we might work out his good purposes on earth.

Many of you took summer vacations in your car with your kids. I imagine long car rides. What is the first question your kids ask? “Are we there yet?” We are an instant gratification society. Spiritually, I ask am I there yet? I am not there yet. Not today. Not tomorrow. But I continue to work out in my life what God is working in me.

Paul goes on to say,

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win

the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Paul says, forget. How do we deal with yesterday's regrets? I forget what is behind me. Holy Spirit, help me accept your forgiveness for yesterday's sin. Help me to find relief from yesterday's guilt. Help me to heal from yesterday's hurts and disappointments.

To put it in our context today: Help me, Lord, to see fully. Help me, Lord, to welcome life being led by you. Lord, help me. I'm full of sap. Help me, Lord, to embrace the refining. Help me, Lord, to see the trials in my life as redemptive, not punitive.

I thought and prayed about how to end this series on worth, and I found a story contributed by Bret Toman that spoke to my heart. I hope it speaks to yours.

In 1940 the Battle of Britain took place in the skies over England. Day after day hundreds of German bombers delivered to the targets below a cargo of death and destruction. The only thing stopping the certain defeat of the allies in western Europe was the Royal Air Force, whose pilots rose to fight the German bombers and their escorts every time. And although their cause seemed futile and more than half of their fighters would be shot down, the RAF pilots never gave up.

Winston Churchill said of them "Never in the history of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." Paul Brand speculates "I doubt whether a more adulated group of young men has ever lived. They were the cream of England, the brightest, the healthiest, the most confident and dedicated, and often the handsomest men in the entire country."

But for many of the pilots who survived, they paid the price with their appearance. A design flaw in the Hurricane fighters they piloted left them vulnerable to explosions that would severely injure them if they didn't eject immediately. Many were left to endure numerous surgeries to reconstruct their faces.

Each fell into one of two groups. Those whose wives and girlfriends couldn't accept the new faces. They either slipped away or filed for divorce. But in the second group the wives and girlfriends stuck by them. Psychologists charted the progress of the two groups.

The first group tended to stay indoors, rarely ventured outside except perhaps at night. They looked for some kind of work to do at home.

But those whose wives and girlfriends stuck by them --- they went on to great successes. Many became executives, professionals, and leaders of their communities. They remained - the elite of England.

These men were elite because they looked into mirrors that told them that. They learned to look into the mirror that gave them a true reflection of who they were that wasn't based on outward appearance. The mirror, of course, was the people who loved them and accepted them in spite of their appearance. They could have been discouraged by the reactions of people on the street or the taunts and laughter of children, but they learned to look into the mirror. And see – This is who I am. I am not defined by the look of the skin on my face. I am the elite of England.

May we look in the mirror and see a true reflection of who we are. Our mirror, of course, is the God who sees us the way we really are - full of worth and value. We need to listen to his voice, the voice that really matters. The voice that tells us we are His - His elite children.

Hold up that mirror. What you see is God looking at you, his elite, and saying to you:

You will not find your worth in what you have, but in who has you.

Hold up the mirror. What you see is God looking at his elite and saying to you:

You will not find your worth in what you do, but in what has been done for you.

Hold up the mirror. What you see is God looking at His elite and saying to you:

And you will not find your worth in what you desire but in who has desired you at infinite cost to himself.

Adapted from *The Truest Thing About You*, David Lomas

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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