

RADICALLY DEPENDENT AGAINST THE GRAIN - Part 2 Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. Let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew Chapter 5, as that is where we will be this morning. We began our sermon series last week about The Beatitudes with an introduction about Jesus' teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is a sermon that lasts from Chapter 5 to Chapter 7 in Matthew, and Jesus begins with these "***Blessed are those***" statements. What He was doing was setting the table; He was creating this sense of curiosity. He is disrupting the soil, like when you want to plant seeds you don't just plop a seed on the hard soil. You need to stir the soil up a little bit so that it becomes soft.

Jesus gives these Beatitudes as a means to which the people, the audience hearing this, are going to be confronted. They are going to be hearing things that doesn't make sense to their world. What they were hearing was incredibly confrontational so they didn't know what that looked like, and they didn't understand that value system. Jesus said a lot of things that went against what was natural to them, and to us, and what is normal in society. So when Jesus is talking about these Beatitudes that is what He is doing. And that is why we are calling this series, 'Against the Grain.'

You probably noticed the wood up here on the stage. And you probably all know when you put your hand across a piece of wood there is one way that feels really good and smooth, but when you put your hand across the other way it is going to be very painful. The idea is this, that Jesus' teaching with every one of these statements is a confrontation. It is not an attack but it is a confrontational approach to us to say, '*Listen, this is not the way I want you to live. This is not who I want you to be.*'

Let's look at the first Beatitudes this morning. Let's begin in verse 1 of Chapter 5 where it says: "***Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***"

We talked about this idea last week of being poor in spirit and receiving the kingdom of heaven. This was something that Jesus is saying if we don't get this then all the rest of them are not going to happen. We have to understand how to be poor in spirit. We have to understand that is who we are if we want to receive the fullness of the kingdom. And again, this goes against our natural inclination to be poor in spirit. And that is because we live in a world by which self-rules. Whatever self we want to talk about, whether it is self-reliance, self-determination, or self-righteousness, there is a part of us naturally in which we want to do what we want to do.

Jesus would never say to any of us, '*You do you.*' That is not in Jesus' vocabulary. He would never say that to us. So what we have to do is to understand what Jesus is saying here is going to confront this idea of the self. This goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden they had a choice. They were living in paradise; they were in harmony with God and with each other. They were in harmony with creation. They were living the life that we

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have all dreamed about living. And yet they still chose to take the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil because they wanted the good life apart from God. Ever since that moment, what is natural to every single one of us as human beings, is that we want to do things on our own. We want to do it our way, we want to have it our way, and anything that comes up against that is going to be confrontational.

Jesus begins with this statement: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” And we need to really dissect that a little bit because there are two questions that I have when I read that statement. Number one - what does it mean to be poor in spirit? And number two – what is the kingdom of heaven? So let’s look at each of these questions in turn to figure out what Jesus is really saying.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It really is this idea of carrying a picture of a beggar. It means that you are desperate, that you are dependent, and you are destitute. If you have ever been in a major city there are usually homeless people there. But to see someone beg for food, whether they are holding a sign, or they look disabled, or whatever it may be, it is usually not a pretty picture. And this word ‘poor’ means that there is nothing you can do to help yourself. There is nothing you can do to feed yourself. There is nothing you can do to make a living. It is this idea of being completely dependent on others for their own goodness in order for you to live. That you are desperate enough that you are willing to do anything to survive, even if you have to sit there on the side of a road and ask for money. The desperation of what it means to be poor, that is this idea.

And what Jesus is saying is you have to understand how helpless and hopeless you are apart from Him. That is one of the first messages of the gospel to understand our need of a Savior. So that is what it means here, and that is hard for us to understand, and it is hard for us to accept. It is hard for us to really see ourselves as desperate, destitute and dependent. None of us in this room are like, ‘*Yeah, that’s me, Ben. I love telling people that I am desperate.*’ No, that is not natural for us. When we walked in here this morning every single one of us had this inclination deep down, whether we acknowledge it or not, to want people to think our lives are put together. We don’t want to look weird. We don’t want to look like we are needy. But that is who we are.

So that is what it means to be poor in spirit. And then the second question is – what is the kingdom of heaven? This idea of the kingdom is something that maybe we talk about a lot, we have heard sermons on it, there are books written about it, and we may even say something like, ‘*Hey man, that was such a kingdom thing that happened.*’ Or we may say, ‘*God’s kingdom is advancing.*’ But what does that mean?

First of all let me just say this. Sometimes we will see in Matthew ‘the kingdom of heaven,’ and in Luke you will see ‘the kingdom of God.’ Let me just tell you that theologically they are the same thing. Okay? Because Matthew was written primarily to a Jewish audience, many times they did not use the word ‘God’ a lot, because of their

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reverence for the name of God or Yahweh. So they would find ways to substitute words so that they would not have to use the word 'God' a lot. So when you see kingdom of heaven in Matthew it is the same thing as the kingdom of God in Luke's gospel. I just want you to understand this, so you won't read the Bible and think there are two different kingdoms. There is just one kingdom and it is described by two different audiences by two different authors with different vocabularies.

But what does it mean to be kingdom minded? What does it mean to see the kingdom of God? I think a lot of times many of us maybe we narrow it down to think the kingdom of God is simply when someone enters into a relationship with Jesus when they are saved and have gone from death to life. They have asked for forgiveness of their sins and they have become a new person and a follower of Jesus. And they think that is the kingdom of God. Right?

And then you have people that are digging wells in Africa and thinking they are doing kingdom work by giving people water. Is that kingdom work? Really, we have to say that the kingdom of God is vast. But here is the definition of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God: ***'It is the reign of God over all creation through His redeemed people to share the fullness of His goodness and good news through Jesus.'*** That is what it means. It carries a lot of these ideas, and I am not going to test you on this definition afterwards, because it is a mouthful, and I get that.

But the kingdom of heaven is really hard to pinpoint into five words, or to have a really narrow definition, because it carries this idea of the kingdom needing a king. So what you need to know when it comes to the kingdom of God is to understand that Jesus wants to be viewed as king, and that God is over all creation. It also carries this idea of it being mediated through His humanity. And that the redeemed are people who were once far from God and now we are brought near to God, and brought into His family. So the kingdom of God can be experienced by humanity today. Right? So it carries that idea.

It also carries this idea of the goodness of God, that we receive good things from the Lord. It is not simply that our salvation is a very good thing and the essential thing, but it is everything else too. It includes the sunshine and the fullness of the goodness of God under His reign as part of the kingdom. And obviously the good news of salvation is only through the person of Jesus. Trying to come up with a definition that encompasses it to be memorable is really hard, but that is how we want to identify and understand the kingdom of heaven.

Now that you guys understand what it means to be poor in spirit and you understand what the kingdom of God is, we are done. You guys can go home. Right? And you would probably think this was the best sermon ever. But you see the problem of a sermon like this, the problem of saying something like ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,"*** is not just that we understand what it is saying; the

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problem is really that we need to understand how we are to live that out. There is something between my understanding of what it means, and my life looking like it.

And that is the problem we want to address. Here is the main idea of a sermon like this. What we need determines what we receive. What we need determines what we receive. The problem that you and I have is that when it comes to understanding being poor in spirit, understanding our need and our desperation from God, that there is something inside of us that at some level we might agree, *'Yeah, I need God,'* but we don't understand how much we need Him. And that is the problem.

And really, listen, we are all here at church this morning. We are at church in January, it is cold outside, and we are at church during COVID world. I think for everyone in this room it is like, *'Yeah Ben, we know we need Jesus, so you are just preaching to the choir. And it is people that are not here that really don't understand how much they need Jesus.'* But the reality is that all of us, every single one of us, need Jesus more than we can possibly imagine.

I grew up going to church because my dad was a pastor. I got saved at a young age. I went to a Christian school and then I went to Bible College. I went to seminary and I have been a pastor for two decades. And if there is one thing that God has taught me over and over and over again, it is this important essential lesson and that is that I need Him more today than I could possibly imagine. The longer I walk with Jesus the more I realize how much more I need of Him. It is just the starting point, but it is also the one we have to keep coming back to. And all the rest of these Beatitudes flow from our understanding of being poor in spirit.

And let me just say this – our entire day flows from understanding that we are poor in spirit. If we want to receive the fullness of God's goodness, it comes from the fact of our understanding how much we are desperately in need of Him. So what I want to do this morning is to kind of confront all of us. And that is because I think when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, every one of us in this room I think would agree with saying that we all need Jesus. But there is a relationship with Jesus maybe that we don't understand that we need Him as much as we do.

So I want to talk to you about five distortions of Jesus that really corrupt our understanding of our need for Him this morning, five distortions of Jesus. And the first distortion of Jesus is this – we simply relate to Jesus as a complimentary Jesus. The complimentary Jesus is really a Jesus that says, *'I know that I have done some bad things. I know that I have sinned. I know that I need a Savior. I know that I need Jesus' death and resurrection; I know that I need His blood to cover my sins. I know that I need that. But I don't know if I have really been as bad as other people.'*

I mean there is something inside of us that we can very easily play the comparison game and think, *'Yeah, I need Jesus, but those people are worst sinners than me.'* Paul,

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after thirty years of following Jesus wrote in one of his letters to his disciple Timothy said: “*I am the chief of all sinners.*” And I think the more Paul walked with Jesus he understood how much more of a sinner he was. Not in a being a horrible person, but he just understood the depth of the depravity that was a natural inclination in him, and how much more he needed God to redeem and restore every single part of him.

See, the complimentary Jesus confronts our own self-righteousness, because all of us want to think that we need God for our sins, but one of the things that I believe the Bible teaches is that we don't just need God for our bad things; we need Him for our good things too. Imagine going to work, and remember how some places have these annual reviews where you sit down with your boss or your employer, and they review how you did the year before. So you sit down and they talk to you for about an hour and a half about how poor of an employee you were. Wasn't there anything positive you did? You know how the evaluations go, they start with the good then it is areas needed to improve. And then they give you the path forward of how you need to improve this year.

Now what if everything was, ‘*No, you have failed at everything.*’ That would be pretty discouraging, right? And many times just in order for us to not face the depth of that we gloss over our own sense of our need for Jesus' righteousness. Here is what I know. Yes, I am a sinner. I have done some really bad things in my life, but here is when I realized I need God's Word as well. I need Jesus' blood to cover not just the sins I have committed, but the righteousness I have done in my own name. You see how much I need Jesus. It is not just that Jesus died for my bad stuff; He died for the ways that I obeyed Him when I did it selfishly, because that is still sin. A lot of times we think we have done bad things, and Jesus helps us with the bad things; but the good areas are kind of under our own management. But no, all the areas are to be for Jesus.

I need Jesus to look into every area of my life, of every action I take, of every motivation I have, and I want Him to be Lord over all. I need the blood of Jesus to cover every aspect of my life. There are all these pictures in the Bible that describe our state apart from God, apart from a relationship with Jesus. And sometimes Jesus used the word ‘lost.’ That word ‘lost’ means ‘separated from Him.’ Sometimes we see that we are slaves to sin. Sometimes there are different verbiages used. But the one that I think is fascinating is in Ephesians Chapter 2 where Paul is writing to the church there and he says: “*We are dead in our trespasses and sin.*”

This is what I know about dead people; they cannot help themselves with anything. And that is the description by which Paul understands is an accurate description of who we are apart from Jesus. We need Jesus for so much more. The fact is that He came to this world and He lived the life perfectly that we could not live, He died the death that we deserve, and He rose again conquering sin and death for us, means that I need Jesus not just to compliment me, but He needs to take over all of me. And that means the good things and the bad things. So we have to let Jesus confront our self-righteousness.

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The second distortion of Jesus is – He is our part time Jesus. You know a part time Jesus is when we say, *‘Jesus, I need you for my salvation. I need you so that I make sure my soul is going to heaven. Jesus, I know I need you to grow as an individual. I know I need you in my marriage and I might even need you in rearing my children and in some of my relationships. But when it comes to my work, my career is completely divorced from your influence or your Lordship.’* Many times we have put parentheses around our lives: this is the God stuff and this is the stuff that I manage and take care of myself.

So we have a part time Jesus. We have a Jesus that helps us with our soul, but doesn’t really help us with our daily life. And so we have segmented the parts in our life; this is the part that God helps us with, and this is the part that we do on our own. It is the equivalent of reading our Bible and praying in the morning. We might even listen to a podcast on the way to work, right? A Christian podcast, but once we walk into that work environment there are no more thoughts in our mind of how do we live out our faith, how do we live out the kingdom of God, the Lordship of Jesus in this place?

What we have done is we have segmented our lives – this is my God stuff and this is my work; this is my health and nutrition, and we have all these divider lines in our heart and in our mind. And it seems natural for us. Most of us have accountants or people who help us with our taxes, so imagine going in to meet with your CPA or whoever. And we show them all our tax stuff and they magically put it into the computer and tell us what we owe or we don’t owe to the government. And we need help like that.

But imagine I am sitting with my CPA and going over all my financial stuff. Liz and I are there, and I say, *‘I have one other question for you. I am having some issues with my kids and I wanted to talk to you about that.’* My CPA would be like, *‘You mean for their taxes?’* *‘No, no, this is more of a parenting issue. I really need help with figuring out how to do this or that with my kids.’* What is my CPA going to do? He is going to be like, *‘You know, Ben, I am a professional in this area, but you need to go see someone else to help you with that area of your life.’*

And that is what we do. If I have a car problem I call my mechanic. If I have an accounting problem I go to my CPA. We naturally have in our mind these dividing lines of going to this person or that person with various problems or needs. And Jesus wants to be our help in every area of our lives. You see it is easy for us to go and ask Jesus to be our Savior. I think that is easier for us to grasp the concept of Jesus as Savior, but what is difficult for us is to understand Jesus as our Lord. And He is Lord over everything, every component of our lives whether finances, work, health, or kids, whatever it is Jesus is asking us to invite Him into it. He knows we need Him to help us know how to be a better employee, He knows we need Him to help us be a better parent, He knows we need Him more than we can possibly imagine. And this confronts our self-confidence in a way.

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And this leads us to the third distortion of Jesus which is a little different, because when we look at Jesus as our part time Jesus we have our lives segmented into His area and into our own area. The third Jesus is the crisis Jesus. Instead of segments horizontally, I want you to think of a scale from one to ten. The crisis Jesus comes along when everything was going great and then all of a sudden something really big happens, and we immediately are like, *'Oh God, I need you right now.'* That is normal for us.

Now don't get me wrong, Jesus wants us to come to Him in crisis. If you look at the New Testament and the story of Jesus there are people coming to Him that are desperate for Him. There was a father who has a son who was demon possessed, and a father whose daughter was on her deathbed, or the leper, or the woman with an issue of blood. These were people that were so desperate for Jesus' help that they go to Him and the Bible describes them as groveling at His feet saying things like, *'If you don't help me, no one else can.'*

And there are times in our lives when that becomes our reality, and it is good to go to Jesus in crisis. But if that is the only time we go to Jesus then it is a problem. On that scale of one to ten there can be certain things that we go through and what number is it at that causes us to use the red phone? Have you ever on your phone accidentally hit a button on the side of it and it makes this alarm sound? It is an SOS emergency thing. Has that only happened to me? Well, if you have an iPhone there is a button on the side and if you tap that button like three times consequently really fast an alarm will go off that will blow your mind. Don't do it now, okay?

I did it the other day and I was like, *'What is making this alarm go off?'* And I looked at the screen and it said, *'SOS emergency,'* and it is counting down three, two, one. And I am wondering what is going on and what did I do to this phone. And when the SOS emergency time is happening in our lives it is the easy time we go to God. There are times when things are okay, or even good, but when things get bad it confronts our self-reliance, we are in crisis mode and we need Jesus. Yesterday was the first day of football playoffs. It was a Saturday and it was filled with food and football so it was a good day yesterday. On days like yesterday I don't think about needing God in those moments, unless of course your team is losing. Then you might pray. But the reality is that in those days, in the normalcy of life that we need to understand that we need Jesus for those times also.

I love one of the things that Jesus said in His high priest upper room discourse when He is talking to His disciples before He goes to the cross. He uses this analogy of, ***'I am the vine, you are the branches.'*** And it was this idea of them needing Him. He makes this statement that I think should confront us at every level of our life. He says, ***"Apart from me, you can do nothing."*** He doesn't say *'apart from me the crises of life are going to be hard.'* No, He says, *'apart from me there is nothing you can do that is going to work out well, that will have you experience the fullness of the goodness and the blessings of the kingdom of God.'* I want the kingdom to manifest itself in every area and

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dimension of my life, whether it is big or small. And that is what we need to invite Jesus to today.

The fourth Jesus distortion, the fourth corrupted Jesus that we tend to have a relationship with is the rubber stamp Jesus. We know we need God in our lives, but man, we have life pretty well figured out. We are smart and we have life put together. We have a plan of how we think life would be best, so this is what we need from God. We need His affirmation to tell us that our plans are good. We want the affirmation of God, but not the confrontation of God. So what we do is we have our plans, and we just want God to put His rubber stamp on it. To tell us it is great and just to go for it. To tell us that everything we do is just wonderful. Is that life? No, that is not life because there are things that we do every single day that we need to be confronted on.

So to just have a God that tells us what we want to hear and not what we need to hear is a problem. But many times that is the relationship with God that we want. *‘Jesus, I just want you to tell me what I am doing right.’* Listen, God is an affirming Father, that is one thing I do know. God is not just interested in telling us what we do wrong. The problem is when we think we know better and we are simply looking for that rubber stamp of approval.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture that I have been reading lately and praying through is this passage in James Chapter 1. And James writes this in the beginning portion of his letter: **“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.”** That is an interesting way to start it, right? He doesn’t say, *‘Hey, you all lack wisdom.’* No, he says, **“If any of you lacks wisdom.”** It is almost like an invitation to evaluate, *‘Do I need God’s wisdom for any area of my life?’* And again, one of the things that I recognize is that I need God in every area of my life. But James has this invitation, **“If any of you lacks wisdom,** because James knows that God is a God who loves to bless us. He says God gives His wisdom liberally and without reproach.

This means that God our Father is looking for us to go to Him and ask for wisdom every day. He is looking for us to ask Him for wisdom to know how to manage a conference at work. He is waiting for us to realize that we need His wisdom to know how to love our spouse, and to manage our kids. He wants to give us the wisdom to know how to manage our finances. He wants to give us the wisdom to manage our problems, and to help us with every area of our lives. He wants us to know that we need Him. This confronts our self-determination. *‘I have life figured out. God, I just want your affirmation, not your condemnation.’* When we relate to God like that, it is not submitting to His direction in life. It is not coming to God and saying, *‘What do you want this to look like?’*

And that leads us to our last Jesus distortion, the fifth kind of corrupted way in which we relate to Jesus, and that is the distant Jesus. This is the Jesus that we keep at arm’s length. This is the Jesus that we want to relate to at 30,000 feet, but not up close.

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This is the Jesus that confronts our self-protection. And I think one of the things that we must do is understand that we have a God who wants to be close to us. And I don't think we can say that enough. Many times we preach on it and many times we read about it. Over and over and over again the Word of God and Jesus lets us know that He wants to be close to us.

He wants to be close to us in our pain. He wants to be close to us in our dark moments. He wants to be close to us when we don't have things figured out. Jesus wants to be close to us in everything. And I love how the book of Hebrews describes Jesus as someone who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was in all points tempted like us, yet without sin. Jesus is in Heaven right now and He understands our struggles. That means whatever struggle you may have, whether it is a sin, or an addiction, or something going on that you are doing, or whether it is something that has happened to you, Jesus wants to be close to you.

It is not like saying, *'God, I have some problems today,'* because one of the things I have learned is that you have to name the hurt, you have to name the pain. I think I have told you this before but I am a podcast junkie. I have three categories of podcasts that I listen to. I listen to sports podcasts, I listen to political podcasts, and I listen to Christian podcasts. And there is a bunch of each of those that I listen to.

So I was listening to one of the podcasts a few weeks ago that I thought was really fascinating, because it was about the area of forgiveness. I can't remember the name of the show, but they were talking about what true forgiveness is. And it is not just saying, *'Hey, I'm sorry.'* And then being told, *'Okay, you're forgiven.'* The idea of forgiveness, if it is really going to happen, then the offense has to be named. If you do something wrong you can't just say, *'Hey, I'm sorry for that.'* Or *'Hey, I'm sorry.'*

No, if you are the person who has offended someone then you have to name the way you have offended them and broken the relationship. Name it, be specific about it. And when you forgive, you have to sometimes say the words, or write them down, what happened and the exact emotion you felt. The more you name the pain, the more you invite Jesus into those specifics of your heart. Jesus wants to be close to us. He wants to sit with us in the pit sometimes, and just be close to us.

I was praying through Isaiah Chapter 40 this week, and I looked at the next page when I was finished, and there was this one verse that was just like shouting at me. I am not one of these guys, one of these spooky Christians that read something and then go, *'Oh my word, that is exactly what I needed today.'* No, that is not me, okay? That is not how I normally do the Christian thing. But I got done praying and I am reading ahead and this verse just spoke to me. It is Isaiah Chapter 41 and verse 13. It says: ***"For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you."*** We have a God; we have a Savior who wants to hold our hand. He wants to hold your hand this morning whatever pain you are in, whatever sorrow you

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feel, whatever rejection you may be processing, or whatever sin you carry. He is saying, *'Give it to me. This is why I came. I bore what you are feeling on the cross. The blood has been spilled and the price has been paid. You can give it to me and I will carry it.'*

Sometimes we have to name things multiple times. Sometimes we have to give the same things over to God many times. But we need Jesus, and we need Him more today than we did yesterday. What about you? How much do you need Jesus right now? What is the Spirit saying to you? I have three questions that I want us to process and think through, and then we are done.

Number one – what kind of a relationship do you have with Jesus? Does one of those five Jesus distortions describe your default? Do you relate to Jesus primarily through one of those distorted ways? Would it be the complimentary Jesus? *'Yeah, I need Jesus because I have done some bad things, but I am not really as bad as other people.'* Is it the part time Jesus? *'Yeah, I have my spiritual realm, but then I have the other stuff that I manage, that I oversee.'* Do you just go to Jesus in crisis or is He with you in every moment of the day? Are you just looking for Jesus to affirm and be a rubber stamp Jesus? *'Don't confront me. I have it all figured out.'* And lastly, do you view Him as the distant Jesus? *'I need you, but just don't get that close. I have been hurt, and I don't know what you will do if I let you in.'* What is the Jesus that is easiest for you to default to?

The second question is this – what self do you need to turn from this morning? What is the self? Is it the self-righteousness, is it the self-determination, is it the self-reliance, or is it the self-protection? What is the self that you need to confront and then turn from? Remember Jesus said, ***"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."*** There is always a turning from and a turning to. What is Jesus inviting you to turn from this morning in regards to yourself?

The last question is this – do you trust Jesus enough to give you His blessings? However in life you think you are managing your need of Him, Jesus wants to give you more. Isn't it hard to imagine that Jesus wants to give us more? And I am not just talking in the health, wealth and prosperity gospel thing. I am talking about Jesus wants to give us more of Him. We can only receive more when we understand we need Him more. And if we don't understand how much we need Him, we cannot receive; not because God doesn't want to give it to us, but because we don't understand we have to tell Him our need of Him more.

What is it that you have to trust to Jesus for today, and to say: *'I have been trying to manage this part on my own, but now I know that I need you both as my Savior and my Lord.'*

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The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.