

## ***Session 1 Transformed by the Knowledge of God***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Matthew 16. I've been looking forward to this week because I'm going to be speaking on a subject that invigorates my heart. I get a double blessing from seeing some folks inspired and from being inspired in my own heart by the Word of God and the subject we're focusing on this week, which is the subject of the knowledge of God. It's the Holy Spirit revealing to us what the Father and the Son are like. My basic premise is that, in the grace of God, there's no aspect of God's grace that more powerfully transforms our inner man than when God reveals God to the human spirit.

I'm going to say that again. The basic premise of this week is that, from my study of Scripture, the study of church history, and from my own personal experience in the last twenty-five years of walking with the Lord, there's no issue in the grace of God that more powerfully and effectively transforms our emotions, and transforms our heart—which is synonymous—than when God the Holy Spirit reveals what God the Father and God the Son are like to us. That's the basic premise.

Matthew 16 is where we're going to begin. That's not on the notes here. As a matter of fact, I won't be loyal to these notes by any stretch of the imagination. It has here the date, "May 1997." Of course, you can see that we dubbed that in. These notes were written years ago. I just like to go with the flow of my heart. Although I appreciate what's on these notes, it doesn't always go that way. We're going to start off in a different direction, so I encourage you, if you're a note-taker, to get out another sheet of paper. We'll ebb and flow here with an overview of John 17, but we're starting in Matthew 16.

Just so you know the way that I operate, I'm in hyper-slow gear right now and I like to stay in a slow gear, but if I start going too fast and you can't stay with it, just wave your hand and say, "Slow down!" That won't bother me at all. I would much rather have you understand what I'm sharing, than make it all the way through the material. I would like you to understand it. If I'm going too fast, which I typically do when I get excited, tell me to slow down. Just shout, "Slow down!" You can say, "What's that verse again?" You can say, "I don't understand what you just said." I don't mind any of those kinds of things. Just pretend that we're in a big living room together, and there's a fireplace there, and we're all sitting around drinking our cappuccino, and I'm just sharing Bible verses with you. I encourage any kind of feedback and anything you want to say. Again, ask me to clarify, slow down, or say it again. If something bugs you, say, "I don't agree with that! Prove it!" I like that kind of stuff. Just relax, and I'll relax as well.

One of the ways that I share the Word of God is by quoting a lot of Scriptures that we won't look at. If I'm going to be on that scripture for a while, I'll say, "Turn to it."

The reason that I say that is because I might say, "Philippians 3:10," and I'll be there for ten seconds to quote it. The person is just getting to Colossians on their way to Philippians saying, "Hey wait, you've already moved on." I'll tell you if I'm going to camp there for a while, and I'll encourage you to turn to it.

The reason I quote the Scriptures a lot isn't to show you how many Bible verses I know. Rather, when I listen to someone, throughout the last twenty-five years, because I'm a teacher at heart, I want to know where it is. It isn't so much that I want to make sure that it's in the Bible. I assume the man isn't lying, but I want to know

where it is so that I can look it up later and check it out. I want to do something with it. It would always frustrate me when they would quote a verse that touched my heart, but I never knew where it was. Then I had to go look it up in a concordance, and this, that, and the other. So those are some introductory thoughts.

### **“ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”**

Matthew 16:13-20. I’m reading from the NKJV. I know many of you have the NIV, so it will read a little differently. This is a very foundational passage in the Scriptures. It’s the passage where Jesus in the flesh, in His humanity on the earth, for the very first time in the Word of God, proclaims the subject of the local church. Jesus is proclaiming the truth of the local church here in Matthew 16:13-20.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. . . (Mt. 16:13-20)

### **A VICTORIOUS CHURCH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST**

Again, the reason that this is such a significant passage of Scripture is because this is the first time that God in the flesh proclaims the eternal purpose of God, which is the Church. You understand that from eternity past in the eternal council of the Godhead, when God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit discussed the mystery, the purpose of God that would happen through eternity, it was the Church. This is the blueprint right here; this is the very first time that God is revealing His secret plan to the human race.

I could go on and on about that. My point is that this is a very significant passage of Scripture and not just a nice Bible story. This is out of the secrecy and the mystery of the eternal council of the Godhead. This plan had never been revealed, even to the angels. This is a very dramatic moment. Jesus declares in Matthew 16:18, “I’m building something called the Church. This Church is going to prevail over the authority of hell.” We understand that “the gates of hell” speaks of the authority of hell. It’s a victorious church that co-partners with Jesus Christ.

Again, there’s so much to say about that, but I don’t want to go off on it except to impress your minds with how significant this passage is—the declaration of Matthew 16:18.

### **THE PLAN OF THE AGES IS FOUNDED ON THE REVELATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

In verse 19, He talks about the spiritual authority that He’s going to impart to them. Most times when this passage is addressed, people go right to verse 18, the inevitability of a victorious church, or they go to verse 19 and the spiritual authority to bind and loose. Typically when this passage is preached, they talk on verse 18 or verse 19. Matthew 16:18 is the inevitability of the victorious church. Matthew 16:19 is the spiritual authority to bind and loose, etc. Those are very magnificent themes in the Word of God. They’re very appropriate themes to

preach from this passage of Scripture. However, I believe that those themes are secondary. As grand as they are, they're secondary to what Jesus is saying.

What's primary is in Matthew 16:13-15. When Jesus is discussing the building of the Church, the absolute, primary issue upon His heart is the issue of how the people out of whom the Church is built perceive what God is like. The number one issue in building a victorious church that operates in spiritual authority begins on the foundation stones of verses 13-15. It begins with the people receiving the accurate knowledge of God by the Holy Spirit. When Jesus introduces the plan of the ages, it isn't an accident that He roots it and grounds it in the revelation of the knowledge of God. You'll understand where I'm coming from over the next couple of days because of how vast this theme is in Scripture. The burden of my heart isn't just how vast and how prominent the theme of the knowledge of God is, but how deficient it is in the Body of Christ. It's my opinion that the most deficient area in the Body of Christ is the subject of the Church understanding with any kind of depth at all what the personality of God is like.

### **THE MOST PRIZED POSSESSION OF THE KINGDOM IS ALSO THE MOST NEGLECTED**

When I talk about the knowledge of God, I'm not talking about the introductory knowledge of salvation. Certainly I'm including that. I'm talking about the introductory knowledge of God that includes justification by faith. That's a part of the knowledge of God, but I'm talking about something that's bigger in scope than what Christians understand on the day they're born again. I'm talking specifically about the Body of Christ growing in a deep knowledge of the truth of the personality of the Godhead—the attributes or the character of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is the most powerful transforming agent in the grace of God, and yet the most neglected issue in the Body of Christ today, and unquestionably the most attacked issue by Satan. Satan attacks it before anything else. That's why it's the most neglected issue.

If you leave this week with this idea, I'll be happy: the knowledge of God is the most prominent and powerful transforming element in the grace of God in your life and yet, if you're like most believers, it's the most deficient area in your life. It's the area that the Church is least interested in pursuing. That won't describe all of you, but my goal this week, if it describes any of you, is to shake you up. I want to arrest your thinking. I want you to leave this week knowing that the most prized possession of the kingdom of God, the most powerful transforming element, is one that you haven't spent an adequate amount of time researching and pursuing in your life. I'll call it a successful week if you get that one point clear in your mind and you actually have a resolve in your spirit to do something about it in a radical way.

### **THE NUMBER ONE QUESTION OF THE AGE IN EVERY GENERATION**

Jesus begins establishing this point with a question. Actually, He's going to ask two questions. He asks one of them in verse 13, and then He asks a more personal question in verse 15. It's the same question on two different levels. First He says, "I want you to tell Me, whom do the people think I am? Whom do they think I am, and what do they think I'm like?" He's really going to zero in in a moment and get them to start discussing what the people think He's like. Then He says, "I want to know what you think I'm like." This becomes the number one question of the age in every generation. In every generation, this becomes the number one and most powerful question.

I picture them all standing around the campfire one night at Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus is excited because He's going to proclaim Matthew 16:18-19. For the first time in human history, the Son of God in the flesh is going to proclaim the eternal purpose of God in verses 18 and 19.

Before He does this, He's going to build the foundation blocks. He says, "When the people hear Me, what do they think about Me?"

The answers in Matthew 16:14 actually give us a little insight into church history. The answers are very diverse; they're manifold. There's a tremendous variance in the answers, in the way that the people perceive who Jesus Christ is.

The first man speaks up and says, "Some of the people think You're John the Baptist. When they see You, they think You're John the Baptist raised from the dead." John the Baptist had just been beheaded. "Jesus, when they hear You preach, they see in You this fiery holiness preacher, this ascetic, self-denying, highly disciplined, rigorous preacher of righteousness. When they see You, that's what they see."

Jesus says, "OK, that's interesting."

One of the men interrupts and says, "No, I've been talking to a different group of people. They don't think you're John the Baptist; they aren't really so taken by Your focus on preaching of righteousness. They think You're Elijah. They see You as a prophet with supernatural demonstrations of power who confronts the powers of darkness, like when You commanded that devil to come out of that young boy, when You commanded the storm to stop, when You multiplied the food, and when You raised that boy from the dead. You reminded them of Elijah, of a prophet with supernatural manifestations of power, with a tenacity to confront, in a really aggressive way, Satan's kingdom." It's a very different picture than John the Baptist.

Another man speaks up and says, "Well, the group I've been talking to don't really think of You that way. They think You're Jeremiah." Many of you know that Jeremiah was known as "the weeping prophet," the prophet of compassion. Maybe this man says, "I saw when the woman was caught in adultery" (cf. Jn 8:1-11). This is a really powerful insight into the heart of God. Here's this woman and she's caught in adultery and she's brought before this group of men, which is already a hostile environment. She has no clothes on. She's completely shamed and she's about to be executed. She's under quite a bit of pressure in many regards. She's standing there. Jesus kneels down and begins to write in the dirt. He's drawing all the attention away from this woman, bringing the attention of all these men down to the ground. This is already a very pastoral act of compassion right there.

No one knows exactly what He writes on the ground. The theories are very diverse. One theory says He was writing the names of the men who had been with her who were standing in the crowd. They were thinking, "Oh my!" One theory says He was writing all the sins of those who were about to condemn her. Who knows what He's writing on the ground, but He's writing something on the ground. No matter what He's writing, all the attention is off of the woman and all the attention is on Jesus and the ground.

They all leave, and then He pronounces His compassion upon her. The one man says, "The group I was with saw what You did, and they said, 'Undoubtedly He's Jeremiah, the prophet with unprecedented compassion for the people of God. That's who He is: He's the prophet of compassion.'"

## **WE SEE ONLY GLIMPSES OF THE FULLNESS OF GOD’S GLORIOUS PERSONALITY**

Then they go on, and the fourth answer is one of the other prophets. In other words, there were several more prophets that Jesus reminded the people of. So the perception of the personality of Jesus is already diverse, even in His earthly ministry. The way that the people interpreted what He was like was so different from person to person. Again this is a truthful statement of church history. When you look at the Church throughout history, most aspects of the Body of Christ camp around one or two aspects of the revelation of God’s personality. I think it’s inevitable that that happens, because our capacity to receive the fullness of God is so limited. We have such a limited capacity. Our minds are so small and our capacity to receive is so minimal that it’s almost inevitable that they we would lock into one or two aspects of the diversity of God’s magnificent personality.

I don’t think it’s so bad that we tune into one or two aspects in a prominent way, but we end up building tabernacles, so to speak, and whole movements around that aspect of God. The thing that becomes negative is that we then become adversarial against the other aspects of the personality of God. So a few hundred years pass and we have whole denominations that are very, very tuned in and focused on one aspect of God.

## **IT’S WHO GOD IS THAT MOTIVATES HIM TO DO WHAT HE DOES**

Jesus looks at them in verse 15, and He asks what I call the greatest question of the ages. It’s the greatest question in time, and it’s the greatest question in eternity. It’s the greatest question of every generation. It’s the greatest question of every season of your spiritual life. I know this is a big statement, but I don’t believe there’s ever a season in your spiritual life, in five, ten, twenty, or fifty years of walking with the Lord, where Matthew 16:15 isn’t the prominent question of the Holy Spirit to you. “What do you think Jesus Christ is like?”

If you phrase the question, “Whom do you say that I am?” you might be limited in your thinking to think only of His mission, mandate, and function.

Peter answered in a way that affirmed Jesus’ function as the Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer who would atone for sin. The question includes, “What’s My function?” but the question is a lot bigger than, “What’s My function as the second person of the Trinity, the uncreated God, Christ Jesus?” The question is bigger than, “What did I come to accomplish?” It includes, “What am I like? Who am I in the essence of My being? What am I like?” It’s who God is that motivates Him to do what He does. Often in the Church we focus on what He does when we need to understand that what He does is merely a revelation of who He is. It’s what He does that leads us back to the truth of what He’s like. What He did on the cross, which is so infinitely magnificent, is a reflection of who He is and the passions of His heart. What He does should lead us back to meditation and understanding of who He is and what He’s like.

The question of the hour in your life and in my life in the Church prophetically in 1997 is, “What Is Jesus Christ like in His personality?” If we answer this question wrongly or inadequately, we end up running from God instead of running to God when we sin or when we fall into temptation. If we answer this question wrongly when we stumble and confront our own weaknesses and sin, and we have a wrong image in our understanding of the personality of God, we run from Him and not to Him. Temptation typically is Satan’s way of providing a temporary comfort from the pain of life. That’s really what temptation is. It’s a way to touch carnal pleasure in a temporary way to take the edge off the pain of life. If we have wrong ideas of what God is like, we take the counterfeit painkillers, these momentary excursions from the path of righteousness, to get false comfort. It’s counterfeit comfort. The comfort is real, but it’s shallow and temporary, and it always leaves the sting of death and shame. It’s a real comfort for a moment. Hebrews 11 calls it, “the passing pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25).

Sin has pleasure and comfort for a moment. It isn't deep and it isn't long-lasting and it always leaves death and darkness and a scar of shame upon us when we take that comfort. When we have a wrong idea of the image of God, we're so much more prone to take the counterfeit comfort of sin when we're under temptation.

### **THE GREATEST PLEASURE IS WHEN GOD REVEALS GOD TO THE HUMAN HEART**

When we have a wrong idea of what God is like, we end up, even before opportunities, even before promotions in life or ministry, having a different paradigm, a different lens through which we interpret success and promotion and what life is about.

Here's what I'm saying. There's nothing more pleasurable to the human makeup than when God reveals God to the human heart. That's a fact of life. That's not just the fruit of my study or something I've experienced a little; it's a fact of Scripture and a fact of redemptive history.

God has created our human makeup with a number of different pleasures. There are a number of different physical pleasures that God created that are righteous. There are a number of different emotional pleasures. There are a number of different mental pleasures, and there are spiritual pleasures as well. God created us with a capacity to experience pleasure in a number of different ways. These pleasures have righteous and unrighteous expressions. Did you know that according to the way your spirit was created, the most powerful, intensive pleasures available to your experience as a human being are spiritual pleasures? It's when God reveals God to your spirit. There's nothing that will more enthrall, that will more excite and invigorate your inner man than when God reveals God to you by the Holy Spirit. When God the Holy Spirit reveals God the Father and the Son to you, simply by the way that you were designed as a human being in the image of God, something resonates in the core of your being in that experience that is greater than any of the other pleasures that God has righteously created for you to enjoy.

### **THE CROWNING PLEASURE OF OUR HUMAN EXPERIENCE IS TO KNOW GOD**

Now God knows this, but if you know this and you experience it a little, the way you think about God will determine what you do even to find pleasure and success in life. Again, the premise that I'm operating under is that the Church has a woefully inadequate understanding of this. Now, I'm not trying to be negative, condemning the Church. The burden of my heart isn't how dumb and how bad the Church is. That's not what I'm getting at. The burden on my heart is how magnificent, how beautiful, how wonderfully powerful this treasure is, and how God is making it available to His people. My goal is to woo you into it, not to tell you how bad you are because you haven't drunk deeply enough of that well.

Our whole orientation of life is formed by our inadequate understanding of the knowledge of God. Often in the Church we have this image of God that's so woefully inadequate that we never think of it as the crowning pleasure of our human experience to know Him. We think of it as a discipline that we grit our teeth to do because good people do that. I'm presenting it in an entirely different light. You were created in such a way that it will resonate in your being like no other experience. It's the experience of God revealing God to you.

### **THE JOURNEY INTO THE TREASURY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

We could never answer this question fully rightly in this age, because our capacity to know the fullness of God is so limited. But the goal of my life is to answer this question a little in the right direction, because the vastness of God is so great. The way I pursue pleasure, the way I define success, the way I face temptation, the way I decide which promotions I take in life and which opportunities I accept, the way that I handle my sin and

failure, are all the fruit of how we answer Matthew 16:15. There's no bigger question in your life than verse 15. There's no bigger issue when it comes to building a church of victory (v. 18) and a church of spiritual authority (v. 19) than answering the question of Matthew 16:15. It isn't like you answer it one way or the other, either right or wrong. It's not that easy. It's a journey—the journey into the treasury of the knowledge of God.

I call the knowledge of God “the divine treasury,” because there are many verses that refer to that. We'll look at that throughout this week. The knowledge of God is a treasury that God unlocks by the Holy Spirit to bring you in and let you take what you want. You can eat your fill; you can take whatever you can carry with you. Our capacity is so small that we can't take very much. There's a divine treasury that God brings us into by the Holy Spirit, and He says, “You can have as much as you can take with you.” Again, our pockets are so small and our capacity is so limited that we can't really take that much with us. In our encounters with the Lord, our capacity increases.

If you understand that this is the number one issue of your life, then you spend your life differently. When it dawned on me by the Holy Spirit that this was the critical issue of my entire life and ministry, and that my whole being, my existence as a human being, was centered on this issue, I began to allocate time differently in the pursuit of this arena of information. When I thought it was just something I did as a disciplined believer, I only did it when I had a little extra time.

I want to present to you the reality of the fact that the issue of the knowledge of God is something that will crown your human experience with beauty and power and pleasure like no other experience in this age. I'm very sensitive to spiritual exaggeration; I'm not exaggerating to you. I don't want to present you with hype. I believe exaggeration always hurts. People get excited and they tell exaggerated stories about how powerful their intimacy was. I'm going to put all the qualifiers on it, because I don't want to sell you something that's not real. If I do, you'll walk away condemned, number one, and you'll walk away convinced that you're so broken that even God cannot fix you. If I tell you lies about how powerful this is, and you believe them, and you don't experience any of it, then you end up feeling condemned and a lot worse off. I'm very sensitive about exaggeration. It makes a good story in the moment, but it doesn't help anyone in the long run.

Exaggeration really does hurt God's people. I don't mean the exaggeration preachers use when there are 500 at a meeting and they say there are 800. I mean exaggeration of a much more serious nature, when we're describing the nature of how we encounter God that's presented as the common way that we're to encounter God. When I say that encountering God this way is the most powerful and pleasurable thing, I mean that in a very specific way. I don't mean you walk in an unbroken sense of spiritual ecstasy. That's not what I mean. I don't mean that if you touch this you never, ever have dry periods, depression, or despair. That's not what I'm saying, either. What I'm saying is that a little of this in your life will affect you. It will affect your entire outlook, and your whole paradigm of life will be impacted by a little of the revelation of God in your spirit. A little of this will touch you and bring you spiritual pleasures.

### **GRADUALLY TRANSFORMED THROUGH ENCOUNTERING PLEASURE**

Most pleasures in life are very, very fleeting. Emotional, physical, and mental pleasures are very fleeting. Spiritual pleasures aren't long-lasting in this age, but they do impact us. They do make an impact; they do change our emotional chemistry. Though, again, we don't feel them twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, just a few moments of it here and there in the course of months and years changes your emotional chemistry. It doesn't all happen instantaneously in one great moment, but it's three steps forward and two steps

back. We begin to move toward a different chemistry change when we experience these little brief encounters of spiritual pleasure. They're brief, and they're not very deep, but they do impact us over five and ten and fifteen years if we stay with it in a very profound way.

I'm not talking about some mystical, ecstatic experience where one day at 3:00pm something happens, and at 3:20pm you're so different that nothing is the same and now you have a story that everyone envies. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about going on a lifelong journey of taking the Logos, the written Word of God, and the Holy Spirit, who is the divine escort, into the divine treasury. I think of this big treasure house. I want you to picture a giant room, as big as a large stadium. It's filled with precious jewels, and all manner of precious gems, and gold and silver and diamonds and emeralds and rubies. If you really want to get a picture of it, picture the eternal city in Revelation 21: 1,500 miles high, 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles long, with glittering diamonds and jewels. That's just a faint representation of the beauty of the being of God. That's just a token of what He's like at the essence of His being.

When I think of the being of God, I think of this vast treasure chest. Isaiah 33:6 calls it a treasure. When God releases the fear of the Lord or any of the knowledge of God to us, it's the divine treasury being released to us. Colossians 2:2-3 calls this the hidden treasure which is Christ Jesus Himself. The treasure of the created order is the uncreated Man, Christ Jesus, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. I think of life in the kingdom of God as a long, long treasure hunt. The Holy Spirit is our divine escort; He comes and puts His arm around us. I picture it very personally. He puts His arm around me and says, "Mike, we're going on this long treasure hunt, you and Me, and My goal is to escort you where you cannot go without Me. I'm going to bring you into contact with information that you could never have discerned, even if you had the greatest philosophical and scientific mind. It's supernatural. It's locked away, and only God can give it to you. I'm God, and I'm here as your escort in this thing called 'life on planet earth.' In eternity I'm going to escort you into this divine treasury called 'the unveiling of the beauty of Christ Jesus to your spirit.'"

### **DEEP THINGS BEGET THE ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE MORE DEEP THINGS**

This is what life is about. This is what makes the kingdom of God work. This is what makes sense of pressure and trials; it's going on this treasure hunt with the Holy Spirit. This is what God wants to give us. Again, our capacity is very limited. We can't receive much of it in any one given season of life. Even the most intensive dose of God is so small, because our capacity is so small. It's big to us because our capacity is small. If you've ever participated in this forty-day fast that's being trumpeted around, on the fortieth day go and try to eat a big hamburger. You can't do it. You can eat a little applesauce, but your capacity to eat is so minimized. Spiritually speaking, our capacity is so small that we only eat small doses, and we're hungry again really soon. That's where the Lord meets us on the day we're born again. He says, "I'm going to enlarge your capacity." "Deep calls unto deep" (Ps. 42:7); in other words, hunger begets hunger. Capacity to know and enjoy God begets a greater capacity to know and enjoy God. The encountering of God gives you a greater capacity to encounter God, which gives you a greater capacity to encounter God. Deep things beget a greater capacity for deep things. The hunger increases. That's a simple way to say it: the hunger increases. As a matter of fact, the very hunger itself creates more hunger. It's a spiritual principle. Lack of hunger has an opposite effect. When you have no hunger, then your hunger diminishes, less and less and less, and it goes into the negative.

When God begins to awaken hunger in our hearts, hunger begets hunger; capacity for God begets a greater capacity for God. That's the meaning of Psalm 42:7: "Deep calls unto deep." Deep things beget, or give, the ability to experience more deep things.

## **THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD WILL COST YOU THE LONGING HEART OF LOVE**

Well, I have your mind all over the map now. I realize that. I'm going in a dozen different directions. Again, my goal in these five mornings is, number one, to challenge you with the concept that the knowledge of God is the most powerful, most pleasurable thing you can experience. Number two, I want to convince you that the knowledge of God is the most deficient issue in the Body of Christ. It's the least sought after thing in the Body of Christ right now. That's the second thing I want to demonstrate. I want this to startle you. I want you to say, "Hmmm, why is it that the most powerful thing is the thing least sought after?" If possible, I want to convince you by the end of this week that it's the most costly thing for you to pursue. It will cost you everything. Salvation is free, but the deep things of God will cost you the longing heart of love. God gives you salvation for free, but He gives you the deep things of the knowledge of His Son only if you're hungry for them. It will cost you, and it's the most costly thing.

## **SATAN'S NUMBER ONE STRATEGY TO DESTROY THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

The other thing that I want to demonstrate is that Satan attacks this area more than any other area of the Body of Christ. Satan accuses God to your heart as his number one strategy to destroy the kingdom of God. The accusing of God to your heart by the powers of darkness is the highest and most common strategy of Satan against you as an individual. Of course, when Satan accuses God to your heart, you're so weakened if you buy into those accusations—which we all do—that you become vulnerable to Satan's accusations against your own heart. Satan's plan to destroy my life is to accuse God to me, and it's really easy for me to buy into the accusations against my own heart when I buy into the accusations against God's heart. When God is accused inside of my heart and I'm accused inside of my heart, I get filled with despair, and the most normal thing to do when you have a lot of despair, because despair is painful, is to go get a little temporary comfort called *sin*. When you get sin, then you're drowned in shame and condemnation, and then you run from God instead of to God, and he catches you in a downward spiral of destruction and death. That's what it's about. It's a very simple strategy. It's a very effective one. He doesn't have to change it because it's so effective. He lies to you about God, number one, and then he lies to you about your own heart number, two. Then you experience pain and despair. Then, when you experience pain, you have to get relief. But instead of getting relief from the most powerful place, in the knowledge of God itself, we find relief in the temporary, passing pleasure of sin, which always marks us with death and shame. Then we can't face God, we can't face ourselves, we can't face others, we retreat into isolation, and he sends the hoards of demons to destroy us with lie upon lie upon lie upon lie upon lie. It all begins with him accusing God to us. The way out of the pit is always found in the arena of getting the truth of God.

I want to convince you that by far the most powerful and pleasurable issue in your life is to get this. I want to convince you that it's the most deficient area in the Body of Christ. It's the most costly area to go deeply in. It's the area that Satan is attacking with the greatest energy and earnestness in the Body of Christ. I also want to give you some practical steps of how to grow in it as a weak human being like me.

So that's the overview of where I want to go this week. My goal is that you would leave this week believing in these things. I'm not saying you don't believe them now; I'm saying my goal is that you would be strengthened in your resolve, so much so that you actually change the way you spend your time and the way you spend your money. If you realize that it seems more reasonable to get this gold rather than the other gold as your primary focus of life, and it causes you to change the way you spend your time and money, then I'll be so happy that I left my friends and family to come to this town to talk to you. I would be so happy if just one of you did that, but I think a number of you will do that. Five years from today I'll meet some of you in

Switzerland or somewhere and you'll say, "Hey, back in '97 I heard that, and I began to spend my time and money differently. I began to go after this gold instead of that gold. I'm not totally transformed, but I'm a lot different than I used to be five years ago."

I'll give you a big kiss right there in public, on your cheek. Someone will say, "Oh, do you know him?"

"Oh no, he just gets really excited when people spend their time and money differently and start seeking the knowledge of God."

### **GOD WILL REVEAL GOD IN AN UNPRECEDENTED WAY AT THE END OF THE AGE**

Here's another thing that I know: if you do it, there's no such thing as a dissatisfied customer in this arena. If you do it, you'll get a whole lot more satisfied customers. I believe there's a divine conspiracy to fill the earth with the knowledge of God before this thing is over. This is where God is taking this. God the Father is going to unveil God the Son in an unprecedented way at the end of the age, and I'm absolutely convinced that the issue that's most deficient and most attacked is the issue that the Holy Spirit is going to reveal with the greatest earnestness He's ever shown in redemptive history, and the Church will be crowned with the glory of the knowledge of God like no other time in history.

I know we're going to win. Matthew 16:18-19 is going to happen. We're going to have a church in victory (v. 18), and we're going to have a church with effective spiritual authority (v. 19). I think it's important to try and do Matthew 16:18-19 right now, but I want to say this to you as well: in my opinion, verses 18-19 will never succeed without verse 15, ever. It's been my experience to watch a tremendous emphasis on verses 18-19 coupled with a near-total absence and neglect of verse 15. It simply will not work. It wasn't an accident that Jesus said verses 13-15 before He introduced verses 18-19 for the first time in redemptive history. They are deeply related concepts, one with another.

### **SATAN TELLS US LIES ABOUT THE PERSONALITY OF GOD**

That's just an introductory idea. OK, where do I want to go now? We haven't started with the notes yet, have we? Yes, you have a question. How does Satan accuse God? One of the ways that Satan accuses God is found in Matthew 4, which is the same thing that happened in the garden with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. The serpent said, "Did God really say this" (Gen. 3:1, paraphrased)?

He starts by getting us to question God, but more specifically he tells us things that are lies about the personality of God. He tells us that God will condemn us and destroy us. He tells us that God is angry and mean. He tells us that the pursuit of God is a frustrating, burdensome, legalistic, death-producing kind of lifestyle. He tells us things about how God is boring and dark and somber and all these things that make us say, "Ugh, I don't want to do that." We get this image of God in our thinking that makes us not want to run to God. When he does that to us, or gets us feeling like God is going to wipe us out in His anger, then we never open up our spirit and pursue God with any kind of earnestness or any kind of perseverance.

That's just a beginning. The real point is 2 Corinthians 4:4. It says that Satan darkens and blinds our minds from the glory of God. When you read the word *glory* there, write, "the glory of the personality of God." He darkens the minds of people as to what the glory of God's personality is like. He gets us believing things that are entirely false about God's personality. Whenever you see the word *glory*, many times, but not always, it refers

to the personality of God, and the unveiling, the revealing, of what God's heart is like. Glory means more than that. Satan is constantly coming to us to lie to us about this.

### **THE UNVEILING OF THE GLORY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST JESUS**

Turn to Revelation 1:1. I'll just share one verse with you. I remember I was here a year or two ago at a conference and I shared on Revelation 1:1, so some of you might have lived here and heard this, but I'll tell you again. It says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him"—Jesus—"to show His servants—things which must shortly take place." Interesting—the Father gave this revelation to Jesus. "And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John" (Rev. 1:1).

Instead of saying *him* or *his*, I put the person's name. What's happening, number one, is that the entire twenty-two chapter book of Revelation has been titled by the Holy Spirit, "the revelation of Jesus." That first sentence is the title of the entire twenty-two chapters. That's a very interesting and alarming sentence, in a good way.

Here's why. Instead of the word *revelation*, you could write, "The unveiling of the glory of the person of Christ Jesus." That's what the book of Revelation is about: the unveiling of the glory of the personality of Christ Jesus, and His splendor, His beauty, and His majesty. That's the unique description of this twenty-two-chapter book that's entitled, "The Book of Revelation."

Now of course Jesus is the Logos, the Word of God, so the whole Word of God is an unveiling of Jesus, The book of Revelation has been set apart in a special way by God and titled specifically, "The unveiling of the splendor of Jesus." That's what that means. Already it gives you a certain heartbeat for the book of Revelation. If you're following the logic, you're saying, "Wow, I'd like to know some of the beauty, splendor, and majesty of the Man Christ Jesus."

I'll say "The Man Christ Jesus" a lot because I like to emphasize His personhood. He's fully God from eternity; He's uncreated like the Father and the Spirit. He's the uncreated God who became Man. I'm not in any way demeaning His deity when I call Him "The Man Christ Jesus." I'm thinking of the verse in 1 Timothy 2:5 where Paul says there is "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5)—the person of Jesus Christ.

### **A ROAD MAP INTO THE SPLENDOR OF THE HEART OF CHRIST JESUS**

Now listen to what's happening here. This twenty-two-chapter unveiling of His splendor is a very strategic, very purposeful revelation that the Father gives of Jesus Christ to redemptive history. The Father gave this.

Let's create a word picture; let's imagine that this unveiling of Jesus is put in a book. The Father gives this book to Jesus. He says, "Jesus, here's this book that I want to give to You as a gift."

Jesus says, "What's the book, Father?"

"It's a very specific and strategic unveiling of Your splendor."

Jesus says, "Is all of My splendor unveiled?"

The Father says, "Of course not, only a little."

“What part of My splendor did You unveil? What part of My beauty did You make known?”

“Well, just very, very wise and strategic parts of who You are. I’m giving this book of Your own beauty and splendor to You.”

Jesus says, “Thank You.”

Obviously this is a made-up conversation. The Father says to Jesus, “There’s nothing more powerful in My entire kingdom than the unveiling of who You are, and I own all the rights to it. Even You don’t have the right to it; it belongs solely to Me. I’m the publisher. I own all the rights to this book.”

So the Father actually gives the permission to Jesus to unveil Himself to an angel, who then unveils it to John, who then unveils it to the Church. This is a glorious gift of God. It’s like a road map into the splendor the heart of Christ Jesus. There’s nothing like the book of Revelation. Jesus Himself couldn’t even give this apart from the Father’s permission. Why? Because the great prize of all the ages is the knowledge of God, the Son’s knowledge. The Father giving this knowledge to the Church is the most powerful act in all redemptive history. It’s the prize of all the ages.

The Father gives this book to Jesus. Jesus says, “Can I do with this book as I want?”

The Father says, “Yes.”

Jesus says, “Then I’m going to give it to My angel.”

How would you like to be Jesus’ angel? You say, “Wow,” but no, you’re way higher than that. You’re His bride. You’re much higher than the angel; you’re the bride of Christ Jesus. You don’t want to be His angel; that was a trick question.

Then He told the angel, “Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to go and give this to My servant John.”

Now notice that this unveiling of Jesus is in an unusual form. It’s in a sort of parabolic form, so to speak. It isn’t a direct unveiling. It’s an unveiling through the agency of things that must take place—through events.

So the Father says, “Jesus, I don’t want to give them a raw, undiluted unveiling of Your beauty. They couldn’t handle it. Besides that, I only want the hungry to see Your beauty. I only want the hungry to get it. Here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to describe events of which You’re the author. I’m going to give things and events. If they meditate on the events and the things, it will lead them to the knowledge of the essence of what You’re like. Number one, they can’t handle an undiluted revelation of Your beauty. It would fry them. Number two, I don’t want to give the deep things of God to people who aren’t hungry. I don’t want to throw pearls before swine. So I’m going to give a bunch of events will take place at the end of history, and if they meditate on these events, it will lead them back to the splendor and the beauty of Your heart.”

The agency God chose was events and things. This is so powerful and so special that Revelation 1:3 pronounces a special blessing upon anyone who reads, hears, and heeds—or keeps—the things written in this twenty-two-chapter book. The very hearing of this book has a blessing upon it. There’s a blessing on the very hearing of the

words of this book, on the reading of this book, whether you hear it preached, or read it yourself, or keep it in obedience, and keep these things in your heart. It isn't just that you obey the mandates. There are only a few mandates in the book, but if you actually keep these things as a treasure in your heart, God will crown your life with a blessing. This book, in a unique way, is the unveiling of the splendor of Jesus Christ. Therefore it only makes sense that this needs to be a book that's really important in the life of God's people.

We get distracted because we try and figure out the chronology of events. This isn't really a book about the chronology of events. There are a few divine hints as to the chronology of events, and we say, "When will this happen?" That's not really what the book is about. The book is about the unveiling of the splendor of the uncreated God, Christ Jesus. I believe that the Father is going to anoint this book and unveil it by the Holy Spirit to the Church, and what this book is about is the beauty and splendor of Jesus. I want to challenge you to take this book seriously in your life.

Again, this book is basically unread by the Church. We read a few verses here or there. This book deserves to be devoured and absorbed in meditation by the people of God. Don't worry about what events are taking place and what city is the city of seven hills and all that. Don't worry about all that. Gaze into the majesty of Christ Jesus. Gaze into the majesty of Jesus. Say, "Holy Spirit, put Your arm around me and become a divine escort. Lead me up that path."

### **CLIMBING THE UNCONQUERABLE MOUNTAIN OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

I always think of the knowledge of God as a mountain, and I think of us climbing a mountain. I always think of it as Mt. Everest, the most unconquerable mountain in the human arena, the mountain in Nepal. Only a few people have made it to the top. They got to the top once from one angle. I've been studying recently, and I'm not at all a mountain climber, but the unconquerable mountain in the human arena fascinates me as a metaphor. Everyone wants to conquer that mountain if they're into mountain climbing; a few people have made it up under the easiest circumstances, on one side of the mountain, maybe once. They've never conquered it. To conquer it would be to go at will at any angle, at any time and place, and to arrive at the top, which is impossible. I call it "the unconquerable mountain," and that's what God is like. God is like this vast mountain. It's costly. It's risky. It takes perseverance. It takes focus. It takes tenacity.

God says, "Come with Me." The Holy Spirit says, "I will take you up the mountain of God and show you treasures you've never dreamed of, if you'll come with Me to the mountain."

I've studied mountain climbing a little: there's the discipline, the preparation, the financial cost, the tenacity, the focus, the freezing. Everything they do for the chance of getting up that mountain is like a rebuke to the whole Body of Christ, which hardly spends any time pressing into the knowledge of God. There's unspeakable treasure on this mountain. I believe that the book of Revelation is like one trek up that mountain, a mountain that's so powerful, and I imagine that there's a large treasure room up there, like a giant stadium. The Holy Spirit puts His arm around me, and He says, "Mike, I want to walk you up that mountain. It will take you your whole life. Then, when you get up there"—well, you never get up it entirely—"then you go into eternity, and then, throughout all the eternal ages, I will continue to show you the treasures of that mountain."

God will continue to reveal God to our human spirit. This, to me, is what the essence of life is all about. This is what makes the mandates of the kingdom workable. This is what keeps things in perspective. This is what gives us the power in the face of temptation and despair. Without this lens on, without this set of glasses, we're just

wandering aimlessly around in circles doing little ministry jobs. Maybe it's a little cruel to view life that way, but that's what I believe. I believe it's still important that we do them, and it changes people's lives, but God is saying, "Why would you walk around in the darkness all the time when I have such light available for you?"

You won't climb that mountain if you only have a casual interest. That mountain won't be conquered through casual interest. This you can be assured of. Amen.