

All In Sermon 1: Noah  
*Mark Batterson*

This weekend we begin a new series of messages titled 'All In' and I sort of feel like a magician who is going to reveal his trade secrets because let me tell you how we come up with sermon series. I don't know if you've ever wondered. About every three, four or five weeks, we roll out a new sermon series and here's how it happens. The process really begins in November when we do a staff planning retreat and our teaching team spends a lot of time just saying, 'God, what do You want to do at National Community Church?' What have we talked about? What do we need to talk about? What are some things that we need to really challenge ourselves as a church? So, this last November, we were seeking God and there were two dominant impressions as we were approaching a new year that we felt like God impressed on us. One of them became the inspiration for this series.

It is so easy to get comfortable and I don't think any of us have arrived. So I feel like God wants us to stretch ourselves as stewards of the time and talent and treasure that He has given us. We need to risk more and we need to sacrifice more. So I was wrestling with what that is, so we were at the planning retreat talking about this. Now, I unwind with ESPN. I don't know how you do it, but that night we were watching ESPN and my roommate, our campus pastor, Pastor Joel, we were watching ESPN and it must have been a slow sports day because then the World Series of Poker came on. How is that a sport? I'm not a poker playing so I don't get it. Seriously, watching people play cards? I wasn't really getting into it and I was waiting for him to change the channel but he was totally getting into it! Then there was this moment where it got down to two players and they are playing for tens of millions of dollars and both players shoved all of their chips to the middle of the table and they go all in, and I start getting into it a little bit! There's the drama of this moment, it is win or lose, it is all or nothing, it is put up or shut up, it is go big or go home, and I thought to myself, we have our series title! Now, I better go on record as saying that the Bible actually does speak against gambling! But I can't think of a better image of what God is calling us to.

Have you pushed all your chips to the middle of the table? Have you gone all in with God or are you holding out? Is there some part of you that you are withholding from God? Here is my prayer for this series – that all of us would go all in. Can you imagine a church where everybody is all in? If you are all in relationally and missionally and financially and spiritually, if you go all in, is there anything that we could not accomplish for God? Where everybody is just all in with each other and with God, I believe that is what God has called us to. So here's the bottom line. I think that some of you are missing out because you are holding out and you think that be holding out, it is keeping you from missing out, but the truth is, when you hold out of God, you miss out. Some of you are not experiencing the power, the joy, the intimacy that God wants you to experience in a relationship with Him for one simple reason – you are holding something out. If you would go all in, oh, your relationship with God could radically change.

Here's what I know for sure, God is not holding out on you. 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ went all in. He went to the cross and died in your place. He didn't hold anything back and we are called to follow suit. God went all in, we are called to go all in. So, during this series, here is my

prayer, that at some point, you would have an all-in moment; that you would have a moment where God would reveal something that you need to put on the table, that you need to push to the middle of the table and that you would go all in. Are you with me?

Let's turn over to the book of Chronicles. We are wrapping up Garden to City. Can you believe it? It was a year ago that we launched this read through the Bible initiative and we are almost there. We are wrapping up with the book of Chronicles, which has kind of been instant replay, if you will, of the history of Israel, and the first nine chapters are devoted to genealogy. How many of you love that part? Here's how it starts. We are only going to stay here a moment then we are going to turn further back to the book of Genesis. But let's start here, I Chronicles 1:1

*<sup>1</sup> Adam, Seth, Enosh, <sup>2</sup> Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, <sup>3</sup> Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah.*

*<sup>4</sup> The sons of Noah:  
Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

Isn't that awesome! Aren't the genealogies so inspiring? I doubt that there is a single person, even if you are the most devoted Garden to City reader, did you really read every single name in the list? It's like you come to the genealogies and fast forward. But here's what I love about the genealogies – they reveal God's faithfulness not just to a nation but to every individual. Isn't that awesome! And God faithfulness to you is unlike his faithfulness to anybody else, and that's why God lifts them out individually because every one is a trophy to God's grace. And so are you!

We have a core value: everyone is invaluable and irreplaceable. That's not just some self-esteem ploy. There never has been and never will be anyone like you, but that is not a testament to you, it is a testament to the God who created you. The significance of that is this – no one can worship God like you or for you. No one in this list of genealogies can do the job of any other job, and I love that. Now here's what struck me, as I read this genealogy, I thought to myself, if Noah doesn't go all in, the whole chronicle of the history of Israel is four verses long because it ends with Noah. If Noah doesn't go all in, the entire story of God ends! No pressure on Noah! This is remarkable to me.

Now, I want to go back to the book of Genesis, Chapter 6, and what we are going to do over these next few weeks is profile the stories of those who went all in, and they all look very different but I think there is a unique inspiration from each of these stories that will challenge us to go all in. We are going to start with Noah.

[Read Genesis 6:5-22]

Let me just make a short observation and then a longer observation. I think this is significant. It says that God was grieved. His heart was deeply grieved. Can I put this out there because I think sometimes we act or think as if God has no feelings? But He does. You see regret on one hand and grief on the other. I think that is significant and I want to talk about this for a moment because God wants a relationship with us and when you have a relationship with someone, you care about the feelings that person has. Otherwise, that relationship doesn't go so well. You've got to care about how that other person feels. It says in this moment that God is deeply grieved. I

want to suggest that when we sin, most of us have this image of a God who gets upset. And on one level, the Bible says that God hates sin. He hates the act of sin because He knows how it hurts us and it offends Him and his holiness. So does God get angry? Yes, He does. But I might suggest that his reaction to sin isn't exactly what we automatically believe it to be. I wonder if the dominant feeling is actually one of grief? I wonder if God is grieved because of our sin, not just because it offends Him, but because it hurts us. Our sin grieves God because, if sin is anything, it is a self-inflicted wound. And God loves us and He hates it when we hurt ourselves. Now, a lot of this I know because I'm a father and I know how I feel about my kids. Have they ever done anything that has made me angry? Yes! But it is my love for my kids that really produces the grief that I feel when they do something that I know ultimately is going to hurt them.

Let me talk about two kinds of sin that grieve God. There is the sin of commission. This is doing something that you should not have done. It grieves God when we do something we should not have done. But there is almost something called the sin of omission and this is not doing something that you could have or should have done. And I might suggest that the church is primarily fixated on sins of commission. Don't do this and don't do that and you're ok. The problem with that is this – you can do nothing wrong and still do nothing right. You can't tell me that it is sins of commission that primarily grieve the heart of our heavenly Father because He is a father and I know as a father that I have dreams for my kids and I believe in them I want to see them grow into their fullest God-given potential, and if you want to know what really grieves me, it is when my kids don't step into the destiny that God has for them. So you need to understand that God's plans and purposes for you are so far beyond what you can even begin to imagine. And it grieves Him when you settle for sin, because He knows who you can become. He knows your potential because He gave it to you and He wants you to become that person that He has destined you to be. But it is those sins of omission when we would have or we could have or we should have but we missed out because we hold back because we are not all in. The sin of omission is just not going all in with God.

I'm challenging you this weekend. Maybe you are even doing pretty well on the sins of commission front, you are cutting back on the things you are doing wrong, good for you. Are you holding something back? Are you holding something out? Is there something that you have not gone all in with God?

I want to talk about what Noah does. I think it is remarkable. What would you do if God said build a boat? This is a pretty big deal. It was unprecedented. They didn't have floods. But yet he was obedient and built the boat. In fact, he did everything just as God commanded him. It's not like Noah built the boat overnight. In fact, according to one Jewish tradition, Noah didn't just start building the ark, he planted trees first, waited until they grew and cut them down and sawed them into planks and then built the boat. That's one tradition, but whether that's true or not, it was a long process. This didn't happen overnight. So I think part of what I want us to see is that going all in, yes there is a moment, a one-time decision where you make a decision to follow Jesus Christ, where you bow the knee to the Lordship of Christ and say my life belongs to You, but it doesn't stop there. You are all in all the time. It is taking up your cross daily and following Christ. And I think that's what Noah does, it is not just a one-time deal. We don't know exactly

how many years but we are talking decades of building this boat and preparing for what God said would happen.

Even after he built the ark, have you ever thought about what life on the ark must have been like? Would it be safe to say that it smelled pretty bad? Scholars have estimated, based on the size of the ark, that it could have accommodated 45,000 animals. There are 2,000 animals in the National Zoo of 400 different species. With 22 zoos, I think it is safe to say that it smelled pretty bad and that it was messy. Noah had to feed those animals round the clock. In fact, extra-biblical legend says that it was no easy job and Noah did not get much sleep while he was on the ark, whether it was the smell or the sound of the animals or just the demanding task of taking care of 45,000 animals potentially. There wasn't a whole lot of sleep. In fact, it is said that during his time on the ark, Noah developed a bad cough and spit up blood because he worked so hard. That strikes me as interesting because I think sometimes we over-glamorize the will of God and going all in, like it's just this one decision, and then afterwards it's just smooth sailing and life gets so easy. No it doesn't! It gets harder. But when you make a decision to follow Christ, I'm not going to promise you that it's going to get easier. In fact, I believe it gets harder. What I mean by that is this – that God continues to stretch you and cultivate your potential so that you can handle more opportunities and more possibilities and then He can use you in a bigger way. Then two years from now, what stresses you out right now won't even stress you out because you are growing spiritually and you are able to handle the task. See, it started with building a huge boat and that was a big task, but then it graduated to taking care of the animals and I'm thinking that was more difficult than building the boat in the first place.

I think part of what I'm trying to say is that going all in is like a zoo! Back in the day there were 19 of us at one location, one service. Do you think that was easier or harder? I look back and wonder what I did with all my time. But over the years as God has blessed us as a church, it has not gotten easier, it has gotten harder and more complicated. But I've come to the point where I've embraced the fact that I don't want an easy life. Like, at the end of your life, do you think you're going to look back on the easiest day? Maybe every once in a while a day on a Bahama beach, yes! Awesome, go for it! But if every day you are laying out on the beach, man, you have an unsatisfying life because it is too easy. When you look back on your life, it is going to be the hard things, the impossible things that you went after in the name of Christ that He gave you the power to do it. Those are going to be the greatest days of your life.

So my job, I think, as a pastor, is to comfort the afflicted but also to afflict the comfortable. And if you are too comfortable, then something needs to happen. You need a big vision from God that will make you uncomfortable so you can step out into the purposes that God has for you.

Here's what I believe, I believe sin will complicate your life in a way that you don't want it to be complicated. But I also believe that the blessings of God will complicate your life, but it will do it in a way that you want your life to be complicated.

The day I married my wife, my life got complicated! Praise God! Praise God for the complications that it has brought into my life. I would not have it any other way. We have three complications named Parker, Summer and Josiah. It gets more complicated as they get involved in more things. I feel like we never stop going, here, there and everywhere. I've heard that the

more money you make, the more complicated your taxes are. How many of you would pray with me, 'Lord, complicate my life!' God doesn't want it to get easier, He wants it to get harder, He wants it to get more complicated but in a way that glorifies God.

Please listen to me. I wonder if some of us are willing to go as far as God wants us to go until it simply becomes inconvenient. And the moment it becomes even minimally inconvenient, ah, you don't know about it. You will never experience the power, the joy, the peace that God wants you to experience if you are not willing to inconvenience yourself. What is Mary said, 'I don't know, a single pregnant teenager, an inconvenience!' Or what is Paul had said, 'Those shipwrecks are so inconvenient, I'm not going on those missionary journeys.' Anybody that God uses in Scripture has a high threshold for inconvenience. Are you willing for God to totally inconvenience your life? Do you know why you need to be at Second Saturday Serve? Because it is inconvenient, because you would rather sleep in on Saturday. Do you want to know why you need to go on a missions trip? Because it is inconvenient. And for precisely that reason, you need to go on that trip. Do you know why you need to fast for Lent? Give up TV or an hour of sleep or something? Because it is inconvenient. That's why you need to do it! If you will inconvenience yourself for God, then God has room to work and He will begin to move in your life. As you go all in, God will begin to move in new ways in your life.

Finally, the Lord says I will establish my covenant with you and you will enter the ark.

When we celebrate communion, what we are celebrating is a God who said I'm going all in. I'm not going to withhold even my only begotten Son; and a Son who said Father if you're willing, take this cup from me, but not as I will but as You will. In other words, I'm all in. As we celebrate communion this weekend, what we are celebrating is a God who went all in for every one of us in this amazing genealogy known as his family. Every single one of us who is a child of God is part of that genealogy and it is because we have a God who went all in. The real question is – are we willing to go all in? I wonder if this communion experience for some of you is an opportunity to either commit your life to the Lordship of Christ for the first time. Say, 'God, I'm all in as I celebrate the fact that you went all in for me, I'm going all in for You.' And for some of you, it might be an opportunity to recommit your life to the Lordship of Christ and say once again as you take the bread and the cup, say to God, 'I am all in.'

Father, we come before You and we give You thanks and we praise You. We thank You for the sacrifice You made for us and we are forever indebted in the most literal sense of that word. Because of the eternal life You have given us, we are forever eternally indebted to your grace, your amazing grace that You offer to every single one of us. Lord I pray that those who need to courage this weekend to say I'm all in, would You give them that courage to take that step of faith and to receive the grace that You have freely offered to them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

All In Sermon 2: Abraham and Isaac  
*Mark Batterson*

I'm excited about this series we are in titled 'All In' so if you have a Bible, turn over to Genesis 22, or at each of our locations you can follow along on the screens as I read.

[Read Genesis 22.1-19]

This is one of the most uncomfortable stories in all of Scripture. There is a tremendous tension because how could a loving God even suggest what He is commanding Abraham? But I have found that it is in the stories that contain tension that we often have the greatest revelations and God is trying to reveal something to us. So I think it is important to wrestle with stories like that.

Let me say this up front – if you grew up between 1963 and 1997, there were moments when you heard this message. “This is a test. For the next 60 seconds, this station will conduct a test of the Emergency Broadcasting System. This is only a test.” It is very importance to notice at the front of this story, it says that God tested Abraham. This is only a test. God never intended for Abraham to sacrifice his son. Now, I understand that this was a culture where there were pagan religions surrounding the Israelites that practiced human sacrifice. So in that culture, it was maybe a little bit more thinkable as hard as that is to imagine in our culture. But God never intended for Abraham to sacrifice his son. In fact, I don't believe God would have allowed it. But there are moments when God will test us.

For the record, this is not a story about God's character; it is a story about Abraham's character. It is not God's character that is up for debate. It is not God's character in question; it is Abraham's character that is in question. So God gives him a test. Now, Abraham, according to Jewish tradition, took ten different tests and this is the final one. This is sort of the ultimate test, if you will, to determine whether or not Abraham was all in. I have found that there are moments when God will test us and will determine whether or not our lives are truly submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Those are difficult tests to take, but they will reveal whether God is still on the throne of our lives or whether He has been displaced by someone or something else. I think God wanted to see if the gift that He had given to Abraham, and please understand, this was a 25 year promise in the making and God finally delivered on that promise and gave Abraham and Sarah a precious little boy named Isaac. Isaac, the same Isaac, the same Isaac God was asking Abraham to put on the altar was a gift from God.

But if we aren't careful, the gifts that God gives us can become idols. The blessings that God gives us can become more important than the God who gave them to us in the first place. So God blesses you financially with resources and with money and wealth, I believe that's a blessing from God, but if you aren't careful, that blessing can displace God and become more important than God Himself. God blesses you with a job and He is the one who has given you the skills and the abilities and He is the one who has opened the door, that job may be a gift from God, but if you aren't careful, that gift can become an idol. It can become more important to you than God Himself. So blesses you with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, good-looking, and you are all excited about that, but if you aren't careful, that relationship can displace your relationship with God. And in that moment, the gift becomes the idol. Another way of saying it is this – God is the end

all and the be all. We exist to glorify God. But you aren't careful, your relationship with God can become selfish in nature. It can become utilitarian. God can all of a sudden become the means to the things that you want. So instead of worshipping God, you begin to worship those gifts that He has given to you. And in this moment, the reason why this is an all-in test is because I think God wants to see, 'Abraham, who is more important to you, the gift that I have given to you in your son Isaac, or am I still the end all and the be all?' This is the ultimate all-in test.

There will be moments where God will test us to determine whether or not we are all in. One of those moments for me is a story I've shared before but let me share some details that I never have. When I was a freshman at the University of Chicago, toward the end of my freshman year, they started to push us to declare a major and I chose something called the PERL major. Political, economics, Rhetoric and Law, a really cool major that combined my different interests and I thought it might lead toward politics or law school. Then I had one of those moments where it dawned on me that I had never really asked God what He wanted me to do. I had talked to the counselor at school but I had never talked to the Counselor. I had never asked God what He wanted me to do with my life. So, the first time in my life, I felt like I really put that on the table and I said, 'God what do You want from me?' And it began a summer of seeking God and after months of asking God to reveal to me what He wanted me to do, the last week of summer vacation before my sophomore year began, I was praying. I got up early one morning and took a prayer walk, and as I was walking through a cow pasture in the middle of nowhere, I felt like God called me into ministry. It came out of nowhere. If you had told me that two years before, I would have said you were crazy. It wasn't the interest or what I had planned on doing. But in that moment, I knew. And I knew I had to decide, am I all in? And here's why that decision was so difficult. I had looked at a school called Central Bible College and I felt like maybe that was the place I needed to go to be able to pursue training for ministry. Here's why the decision was so difficult for me. This is a little bit embarrassing for me to admit, I hope you take it the right way, but I got one B in high school and it was in an honors class. So by the time I was done, I had a 4.15 gpa and it wasn't because I was particularly smart, I did ok on the SAT and the ACT. I'm a perfectionist and I strived to work hard and grades were important to me, and when I graduated from high school, I had one objective, I was going to go to the best school that I could get into. So at the time, the University of Chicago was the third ranked university in the country and produced more Nobel Prize winners, not that I had set my sights on that, but it was the third ranked university and they let me in. On paper, it was perfect. Along with academics, the other thing that was incredibly important to me was athletics. I played basketball at the University of Chicago and by the end of my freshman year, I was getting a lot of playing time and I was starting some games, and so here's what I'm trying to say – on paper, it was everything I had hoped for, worked for, dreamed for, and I had a full ride scholarship! I went to school for free and it was one of the most expensive schools in the country. That's what made the decision so difficult! You have no idea how easy it would have been for me to rationalize. And I had people saying, 'You do not want to give up that scholarship.' 'Just finish out your time there and then go to seminary.' But I knew it wasn't what God had for me. Here's what's crazy, it was a gift from God. I absolutely believe that God was the One that enabled me to be able to even get accepted. So it's this tension, God how can you be calling me to give up something you have given to me. And it was in the tension of that that I made one of the toughest decisions I've ever made. And in that instance, I walked into the counselor's office and said, 'I'm transferring.' And when I told them where, they were scratching their heads. CBC wasn't even a regionally accredited school. It

didn't even have some fundamental academic qualifications. People looked at me like I was throwing everything away. Like, what are you thinking? I don't have time to go into great depth, but I look back on that decision and I think as my life has unfolded, I look back at that all-in moment as one of the greatest decisions I ever made. I transferred to CBC and I felt like I was giving everything up, but I wasn't giving anything up. You aren't giving anything up if you are walking in the will of God. You have not sacrificed a thing.

So God began to lay a foundation and He began to point me on a different path and I praise God! I love what I do! I would do what I do for free. I don't mind getting a paycheck but I would do what I do for me. I would not want to be anyplace else doing anything else with anyone else. I am doing what God has called me to do. But it traces back to one of those all-in moments.

Here was the turning point for me. I think for many years, I had what I would describe as an inverted relationship with God. I put my faith in Christ when I was five years old after watching a movie called *The Hiding Place*. For whatever reason, God used that movie to touch my heart and I put my faith in Christ, but if I'm being honest, it really wasn't about me following Jesus, it was more about Jesus following me. I wanted Him to follow me everywhere I went. 'Would You please follow me onto the court and bless me and help me jump higher and shoot better? Would You follow me into the classroom and help me on this test that I haven't even studied for?' It wasn't about God's purposes, it was about God serving my purposes. It wasn't about God's agenda for me. But here's the thing, it was such a subtle selfishness. It was all about my agenda for God. I wanted the God of the universe to revolve everything around me.

I've got to ask the question – are you following Jesus or is Jesus following you? I think that's the difference between being all in or holding something back from God.

Now, why is it that sometimes we are not willing to go all in? Why is it that we aren't willing to put things on the altar? I think one of the reasons is because we are scared. Going all in is saying to God, 'I'm willing to go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you want me to do.' That's scary because there's a part of us that thinks God is going to tell us to go somewhere we don't want to go to go something we don't want to do. Or is that just me? I think there is this fear that somehow our lives are going to be the opposite of what we had dreamed for and hoped for. You know what? It's going to take some sacrifice and some risks and I'm not going to tell you that God isn't going to take you to some places you don't want to go but I just don't believe that at the end of the day, God is about making your life miserable. In fact, I subscribe to what Frederick Beatner said. I love this. This has to be taken within the context of if you are living within the guardrails of God's good and pleasing and perfect will, then here is what I believe – the voice we should listen to most as we choose a vocation is the voice we think we should listen to least. It's the voice of our gladness. What can we do that makes us the gladdest? I believe if it's a thing that makes us truly glad, then it's a good thing. Beatner said you need to find the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. I love that. So here's one of the things I tell the church planters because I'm always getting the question, how'd you get from Chicago to here and how do you make a decision about where to plant and what to do? Ok, you've got to hear the voice of the Spirit of God telling you where to go. At the end of the day, that's the deciding factor. But one of the things I tell church planters is – where do you want to live? Some are thrown off by that. They say, 'No it's about where God wants me to go.' And I say, 'No,

where do you want to live? Do you like the suburbs or the city? Where would you want to live and raise a family and get involved in that community and be buried? Where do you want to live?' Because maybe, just maybe, that's where God wants you to be!

I love Washington D.C.! It had to grow on us a little bit but I love it. What I'm trying to say is that you don't need to fear the will of God. God gives us the desires of our heart. What that means is He begins to download those desires into our heart by the Spirit of God. He creates those desires and we've got to listen to those sanctified desires as we pursue God's will for our lives.

Back to Abraham. He gets up early and he saddles the donkey and they head off. For what it's worth, according to Jewish tradition, the reason he got up early is he wanted to get up and leave before Sarah woke up. We read these stories and we don't even think about the dynamics, but I'm thinking if I came to Lora and said that the Lord had called me to sacrifice one of our children, she might have a few questions. Let's just say that we've had arguments over things of lesser significance than what is happening in this story! Now, the truth is, according to tradition, they talked it out and they were both on the same page, but Abraham got up early before she woke up just in case she changed her mind! Not that women do that! Did I just say that? Well, the guys are still listening.

You want to know who else is overlooked in this story? Isaac. He is seen as a passive player in this, but that changes when you understand that most scholars believe he was 25 years old. Some suggest he was the age of 37. What that tells me is this – his dad is a Centenarian. So, who's going to take who if it comes down to it? Abraham had long since ceased to be the wrestling champion of the Abraham family. According to Jewish tradition, Isaac submitted to the sacrifice. In fact, listen to this. It is believed that he said to his father, 'Father, bind my hands and my feet for the urge to live is so willful that when I see the knife coming at me, I may flinch involuntarily. I beg you, bind me.' This isn't just a story about Abraham going all in. It is about Sarah going all in and it is about Isaac going all in.

We come to the moment when he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, and this is the moment when if you are seeing it in the movie theater, you avert your eyes. You don't want to see it and you hope they don't actually film this moment. They can't film this moment. You can't imagine this moment, but as Abraham raises the knife, God steps in.

*'Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.' Abraham looked up and there in the thicket, he saw a ram caught by its horn. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called the place The Lord Will Provide.*

God reveals Himself as Yahweh or Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides. But it literally means the God who foresees. But beyond that it means the God literally who foresees. Provision is an act of foresight. It is anticipating a need that will exist and meeting that need before it happens.

Now, I'm intrigued that some Jewish Rabbis taught that this particular ram that was caught in the thicket came from the Garden of Eden. It grazed under the Tree of Life and was created at

twilight on the sixth day and was created for the specific purpose of being made provision for in this very moment in human history. I don't know whether that is literal or figurative but that imagery reminds me of Ephesians 1 where it says in the Message translation:

*Long before God laid the earth's foundations, He had us in mind. Long, long ago, He decided to adopt us into his family. He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need.*

That's impossible for us to comprehend. I remember a few years ago I was reading about C. J. Tan, the guy who led the IBM team that created Deep Blue, the computer that outmaneuvered chess grand master Gary Kasparov and defeated him. Deep Blue incorporated 32 processing engines that could contemplate 200 million chess moves every second. I have a hard time with 50/50 questions, like yes/no, true/false, right/left, vanilla/chocolate. I can't even begin to comprehend 32 processing engines that can contemplate 200 contingencies every second, yet that is laughable to an omniscient God, who before the creation of the universe, understood every contingency that would ever exist, every need that we would ever have was not just anticipated and foreseen but provided by God Himself. If you understand that, then you are willing to put things on the altar because you know that God has already made provision.

See, we miss the language in this story. Abraham knows that God is going to provide. Do you remember when he says that we will go and worship and WE will come back? He knows they are coming back. He knows, 'God you will provide. I do not understand it but I am here believing that somehow, some way, You are going to provide.'

Here's what I've learned about God. We focus so much on God's character that we forget that God also has a personality. And part of God's personality is that He loves to provide but He does it in dramatic fashion. You cannot read the Bible and come to any other conclusion. Why did God wait until the Egyptian Army is right here and the Red Sea right here? They might make a movie about it! It might actually be more dramatic! Why did God wait until a downward motion had begun? Because He wants to test us and see if we trust Him in those moments. If you trust God to provide, this is a trust issue. How much do you trust God? Enough to put your Isaac on the altar? Lora and I were talking about this this week because we've been so challenged by this series. If God spoke to you and said, 'I want you to give your entire life savings by faith, everything you've accumulated, I want you to give your entire life savings and put it on the altar and give it to something that I impress on your heart, would you be willing to do it?' If God said, 'I know you love that job, I gave it to you, I even gave you the promotion and the paycheck,' would you be willing to put that thing on the altar and just leave that career? Would you be willing to do it?

I want to tell you what I've discovered. It is not always that God wants to take those things away, but are you willing to give them up? That's the issue. I've found that sometimes I have to die to certain things. I have to put certain things on the altar and die to them for God to give them back. I can tell you story after story of things that I've felt like I needed to sacrifice. It goes all the way back to church planting when I was in seminary. That was the dream. That was the thing that God had called me to do, but I'm pretty sure I went into that first church plant for the wrong reasons, and it failed. But that thing needed to be put on the altar, it needed to die so that God

could resurrect it a couple years later and then maybe I could do it for different reasons. I have found this in so many different ways.

Let me share one. Lora and I lived on Capitol Hill for 15 years. We bought a home 15 years ago and I feel bad because we bought when the economy was at bottom. Don't hate us for that, the Lord blessed us and we lived there for 15 years and we were very happy and very content. Then one day we spotted a home that was a little bit bigger. We were content where we were but as our kids got bigger, our house got smaller and we thought to ourselves that we like that and it would be neat, but we wanted to make sure it wasn't something that we wanted that God didn't want for us. Long story short and after praying about it, we put an offer on that home, it was about two years ago and they didn't take our offer. We felt like God was calling us to walk away from it, not to counter. We were like, 'God we want this pretty bad but we are going to put this on the altar and die to it.' And we did. It was about a year later, and I promise you we didn't obsess about it or even think about it, it was what it was, then one day out of nowhere, we are driving by and Lora said, 'Do you ever feel like that's the house that got away?' We hadn't talked about it. The next day, there was a For Sale sign in the front yard. Now, that might be more than a coincidence. So we waited a couple of weeks because we didn't want to look too desperate. But we went back and here's the thing, it didn't sell. We didn't even know that. It was on the market for 252 days but it never sold and they took it off the market, then one day decided to put it back on the market. So we waited a few weeks and we put an offer in and here's what we did, we told our realtor, 'We want you to make the same exact offer that we made a year ago. It's our best and final offer and if they don't take it, we are going to walk away from it forever.' So they took the offer and over that year, our house's value had rebounded a little bit and we made more money on the sale of our house than we would have made a year before, and the thing I was probably most excited about was it meant that as we tithed on our profit on that house, it meant we could give a bigger gift. I learned that lesson once again, that, are you willing to walk away and put things on the altar. You know what? That home, we treat it differently, we steward it differently, we look at it differently, we live in it differently, because we put it on the altar. We said, 'God, it belongs to You and if You don't want us to have it, then take it away.' And He did, but then He gave it back. And sometimes that's the way that God works.

Is there something that you need to put on the altar before God? Is there something that you need to be willing to sacrifice to God? Here's what it says in verse 15

*<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

Do you realize that we are children of Abraham? Have you connected that dot as I've been talking? I think sometimes we fail to do that. If your faith is in Christ, then you have been grafted in to the family of Abraham and he is your father. The blessings that you enjoy as a child of God trace back to a moment, once again, where someone was willing to go all in. See, you never know how your step of faith is going to affect the people around you. It is not just about you, it is

about how your life can influence others around you for the redemptive purposes of God. And when you go all in, you never know how God is going to use your act of obedience. God says you have not withheld. In other words, you are not holding out and you are not holding back. Is there something you are holding back? Is there something that has become more important to you than God? And would you have the courage to put that thing on the altar? I can't tell you what will happen. No, when I put that scholarship at the University of Chicago on the altar, God totally took it away. It was tough at the time but I'm grateful that he did. When we put that home on the altar, God gave it back a year later. I don't know, because I'm not God, but I know at the end of the day, we hold out on God because we think we are going to miss out if we don't have our little things that are important to us. But the truth is, if you are holding out, you are missing out. It is only when you put everything on the altar.

Some of you are wondering why don't I feel the fullness of God's grace or why have I not experienced God's power working through me the way that I read in Scripture? I think one of the reasons is that if we are holding back, then you do not allow yourself to be the full conduit of God's grace and power, the things that He wants to do in you and through you, He can't do because you aren't fully on the altar. You haven't placed yourself in that place where you are willing to give God anything and everything.

Here's how I want to close. This little thought – we read this story and here's the great irony, we can't imagine how God would even propose this kind of scenario. How could God even think up this kind of sacrifice? Then we read twice where it says, you have not withheld your son, your only son, twice it says your only son, and you would think it would jog our memories to recall another place in Scripture where someone else gave their only Son and yet we read this and we never even see what is revealed. But here's the deal, all other religions are about what you can do for God, but that isn't what Christianity is about. It is about what God has done for you in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christianity is not about what you can do for God, it is about what He has already done for you.

*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

So the very scenario that we cannot even begin to image, God, the Father, has done for us in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. God is all in. The question is – are we all in? Let's pray.

All In Sermon 3: Caleb  
*Mark Batterson*

If you have a Bible, turn over to Joshua 14. I'll give you a moment to get there. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. At one point, Moses sent 12 spies to spy out the Promised Land for 40 days. One of them was named Caleb. Caleb came back with a positive report, silenced the people and said, 'Let's go and take possession of the promise that God has given to us.' But 10 out of the 12 spies had a bad report. They said, 'We seem like grasshoppers in the eyes of the giants we saw in the land.' They failed to claim the promise and an entire generation died. But 40 years later, God gives them a second chance. Aren't you glad that God gives second chances? Fast forward, 45 years, Caleb is the oldest man in Israel by a longshot. His entire generation has died off and according to tradition, Joshua was probably less than half his age. Joshua may have been 17 years old when explored the Promised Land, Caleb was 40 and he is now 85 years young.

That's where we pick the story up, verse 6

*‘ Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb said to him, “You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. ’ I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions,*

This is a town where we better live according to the convictions that God has given us. And we as a church have some convictions, things like the church ought to be the most creative place on the planet; and things like the church belongs in the middle of the marketplace; and those convictions guide the way that we do ministry. It is very difficult to live according to your convictions but I believe that's part of what it means to go all in. You do not compromise your convictions relationally, occupationally, financially, you just don't compromise because you are living according to your convictions.

*‘ but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear.*

Really, the difference between going all in and just holding out is, it really comes down to this, are you going to let fear dictate your decisions or are you going to let faith dictate your decisions? Those two things will take you in very different directions. It's the difference between entering the Promised Land and claiming the promises of God and experiencing miracles, or just spending your entire life on the other side of the Jordan River wondering where is God. That's the difference.

*I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. ’ So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.’*

*<sup>10</sup> “Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! <sup>11</sup> I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.*

I like this! I don’t know about you but I really like this. I’ve always loved what Ashley Montague says, “I want to die young at a ripe old age!” This is a young man in an 85-year-old body but what makes this profoundly amazing is the connective preposition here, the word ‘as’ means identical in the Hebrew language. Translation: he could bench press as much at 84 as he could at 40. That’s what it means. It means he literally was as strong at 85 as he was at 40. Awesome! I liked Rocky V, forgive me for that, but seriously! How can you be that buff when I know the actor is in his sixties? Are you kidding me? This is like Mr. Miyagi in the 2029 remake of the Karate Kid, still throwing down. This is an 85-year-old man that you don’t want to mess with! I wish we had the audio tape because I can’t do this justice. Just try to imagine the conviction in his voice when he said this. This is the Braveheart moment. This is the Gladiator moment.

*<sup>12</sup> Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day.*

Doesn’t that send a little tingle down your spine?

*You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”*

*<sup>13</sup> Then Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. <sup>14</sup> So Hebron has belonged to Caleb ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.*

Caleb was all in!

We’ve been talking about what it means to go all in, and the truth is, it looks like lots of different things. It looks like Noah building an ark in the middle of the desert. I think it looks like Abraham putting Isaac on an altar. And I think it looks like an 85-year-old Caleb saying, ‘Give me the hill country!’

Here’s what I love about Caleb, it’s not just the fact that he was all in when he was 40, it’s the fact that he was still all in when he was 85. I understand our demographics. Some of you can’t even imagine 40, let alone 85! He didn’t retire at 65, he didn’t decide to play it safe at 70 or play shuffleboard at 75. If he had the opportunities available to him that we have to us, my thought is that he is skydiving at 80, climbing Everest at 81, hiking the Grand Canyon rim to rim at 82, running the Ironman Triathlon at 83, takes up cage fighting at 84, and at 85, ‘Let’s start a war! Let’s go after the hill country!’

I love the spirit of Caleb. You know what? The simple answer to why he was as vigorous at 85 as he was at 40 is because his faith never diminished. In fact, his faith grew stronger over time and it was that faith that animated him and energized him in a way that I pray we will experience. I pray that God would give us the spirit of Caleb.

Now why did he pick Hebron? I think he picked it for a couple of reasons. For starters, it is the highest town in Palestine, almost 1,000 meters above the Mediterranean, which tells me that it was the high ground, which means it would have been the most difficult place to attack, the most difficult place to conquer. And I think this is the guy who doesn't even, like, path of least resistance? I don't know what that is. It is not in his vocabulary, not in his mindset. Give me the hill country! It also says that the Anakites lived there, a race of giants, very large men, and maybe women. Caleb says give me the hill country because I think he wanted the sheer joy and privilege of the most difficult battle so that he could experience God receiving the most glory. That's the spirit of Caleb.

One footnote, and I think it is significant. According to one Jewish rabbi, when Caleb was in the Promised Land scouting out the territory, at one point he left the other 11 and he went off to Hebron, because Hebron was where his ancestors of 500 years before were buried. Their gravesites were there. Abraham lived much of his life in Hebron and according to this tradition, he went to Hebron and fell prostrate on the ground and prayed on those gravesites where his ancestors were buried. Can I ask you, do you think that was a powerful moment for Caleb? I usually don't reference something that we are doing at one of our locations, but at our Ebenezers location, we sang a hymn, It Is Well With My Soul, every time we sing that hymn, I'm back at the cemetery in Naperville, Illinois at the graveside service when my father-in-law was buried because we sang that song at that graveside service because it was one of his favorite songs. I can't sing that song without feeling overwhelmed at what he meant to me and how much our family loved him and how powerfully motivated I am to serve the Lord because of the example he set in planting and pastoring a church faithfully for more than 30 years. And I'm thinking to me, if that song has that kind of impact on me, I mean, how often with Caleb did he go back in his mind to this moment when he falls prostrate on these gravesites and prayed that God would give them that Promised Land, imagine the heartache when he silenced the people and said, 'We can surely do it, the Lord is with us, we can claim this promise,' and how devastatingly disappointing it was for 40 years, he had to pay the punishment for those who didn't have faith. But he never gave up on that promise. That promise was in his heart and it grew in his heart and finally, 45 years later with 45 years of passion pent up in his soul, he said, 'Give me that hill country! I am going back to the place where I fell prostrate and prayed that God would keep his promise!'

By the way, Hebron is where Caleb's descendent, a shepherd by the name of David, would be anointed king of Judah, and where for seven and a half years, again because it was such an elevated, fortified place, would make his capitol city until it moved to Jerusalem. David doesn't have his capitol unless a guy named Caleb says I'm all in! Do you see the history that we are a part of? It goes back to Noah that goes to Abraham that goes to Caleb. If Caleb is not all in, they never claim that promise and they never experience the miracle that God does.

I've met Caleb. About a year and a half ago and I'll tell you his name in a few minutes, but God has given us the hill country, literally. One of the biggest miracles in the history of this church went down a week ago. I asked you to pray. I really didn't know which way it was going to go. Let me tell you this story and I'll tell you the backstory.

When the movie theaters at Union Station closed a year and a half ago, we shifted our Capitol Hill location to Ebenezers Coffeehouse. Now, praise God, in his providence, He already had a place for us to go, but we had always planned on it being a temporary shift. Sometimes the word 'temporary' has different definitions. The truth is, God has blessed it so we have no intentions of not having a presence in our performance space where we throw down and worship God, where the good news of the gospel is taught, so praise God for Ebenezers. Here's the problem, no matter how many locations we launch and no matter how many services we have, we consistently have gatherings where we have twice as many people as what the space is designed for. A year and a half ago, we started saying, 'God, we need someplace else on the Hill, would You open some door? We don't know where to go.' And I kid you not, we have prayed like it depends on God and worked like it depends on us and no door has opened, and we are knocking loud! As we continue to crawl and as there are actually gatherings where we have to tell people they can't come in, we've gotten more desperate, and I believe that God has answered that prayer. Shortly after Union Station closed, one day I was driving down 8<sup>th</sup> Street. For our locations that aren't on Capitol Hill, it is called Barracks Row. It is the main street of Capitol Hill. It was the first street of commerce in Washington D.C. because when the Navy yard was built in 1799, people would come and dock there and so 8<sup>th</sup> Street came right off of that dock and it was the first street of commerce. It was thriving and flourishing until the middle part of the last century, when, for a variety of reasons, it just went downhill. The 1968 riots were the last straw and most of the businesses left. What you had left was a part of town that you weren't sure if you were safe to walk through it. About a decade ago, Barracks Row and some other initiatives began a revitalization and redevelopment of that area. Dozens and dozens of facades were restored, restoring the grandeur of that street, dozens of new businesses creating new jobs, including two of my favorite restaurants, Matchbox, I love the pepperoni pizza, and Ted's Bulletin, homemade pop tarts! It really is an amazing part of town that is very different than it was a decade ago. Long story short, as I drove by, I noticed the People's Church. I knew it was there. I had never met the pastor, but it caught my attention because it is in the 500 block, which is in the heart of Barracks Row and then I noticed the old marquee because I knew it used to be a theater and I thought, wow, here's a church doing church in a theater long before we came around, and I felt like I needed to call the pastor. Now, I'm going to tell you that if God had said, 'Mark, where would you like on Capitol Hill? Is there any place that you feel like you'd like? Is there someplace if you could have anything?' I have to admit that it would be that place, People's Church on 8<sup>th</sup> Street in Barracks Row. But I felt kind of bad for feeling that. There's a church that's meeting there. I didn't know much about them. I didn't know the pastor, but I felt like I should call him, so I did, and we had lunch, and I found him to be one of the most gracious people I've ever met. I found someone who has become, to me, more than a friend. I love Pastor Michael Hall and his wife, Carrie. Well, I felt like God was prompting me to ask if they would ever consider selling. Here's the reason why I felt the freedom to ask that, because I knew that a few years before, the church had been on the market and they had tried to sell it but it didn't happen for a variety of reasons, and he said to me, 'Mark, we love what you are doing. We've known about you and it is wonderful to meet you and we will lease you space for free. You can have our space for free.' But the problem was we needed it on Sunday morning and that's when their services were, so it really didn't solve the problem we were having. So I said, 'Would you consider selling it?' And I've got to tell you I prayed long and hard before popping that question and I didn't really care whether it was yes or no, I felt like I was being obedient to a prompting that the Lord had given me. I just prayed that he wouldn't be offended, and he wasn't. And he

said, 'You need to know that when we were going to sell this church, it was a nightclub that was going to buy it.' They offered them a lot of money for it, but the community was against it. They didn't want a nightclub in that space and the church voted unanimously not to sell. After all, they'd been there since 1962. He did explain to me some of the history that as some of the demographics have changed, that very few people live in the neighborhood anymore. Almost their entire congregation commutes in from Maryland and the problem they were experiencing is that they don't have parking. You know how slammed Barracks Row is and it's an older congregation and it became a big enough issue that he shared that with me. So, we left and we just periodically have lunch together and we built a relationship and it was about six months later that I felt prompted to ask him that question again. I was like, 'Lord are You sure?' I didn't want to offend him, but once again, I asked the question and it was an immediate no. But he said if they ever sell the church, they want it to be to National Community Church. Ok. I'm thinking, we don't need it in ten years, we need it now. We have a piece of property on Virginia Avenue three blocks from the People's Church. But that's not going to be ready for three or four years. We need it now as we transition.

What's interesting is that over the next couple of months, I bumped into them everywhere. One Wednesday night, I'm having dinner at Matchbox and I popped down there and they have their midweek service on Wednesday nights and on that Wednesday night, probably the only Wednesday night this has ever happened, no one showed up for their midweek service, but I was there. So we talked for an hour and a half and shared our hearts with one another. Then after an ANC meeting that the People's Church was hosting, one night we spent an hour outside just talking, and it was the first week of February. I remember it because it was right before the Super Bowl. And I felt prompted once again to ask him one more time but I'm not going to beat a dead horse. So I said, 'Would you consider selling?' And he said no. On February 5<sup>th</sup>, I got a text while Josiah and I were headed to Dallas and it said, and you gotta love this, did I tell you how old Pastor Hall is? His parents, Fred and Charlotte Hall founded the church in 1962. His mom is still preaching and she is 96, and he is 71. I got a text, and I love that he is texting at 71! He said God is doing something in my heart, because at the end of our meeting, he had said he would pray about it, and I knew he meant it, and he did. A couple days later, I have to tell you the chain of texts that goes back to February 5<sup>th</sup> on my phone, someone needs to tell me how I can back that up and save it because I never want to lose it, it's like an epistle to me because it is a history of what God has done over the last six weeks. He said, 'My heart is open to this, in fact, I believe it is the right thing, I believe it is God's provision for us and I believe it is God's provision for you.' A couple weeks later, he said he would talk to his leadership, and I prayed for him so hard, asking God to help him know what to say and whether they are supportive or not, would You allow it to bring even greater unity to that church. He texted me two weeks ago on a Sunday after a board meeting on Sunday night and said that the leaders responded to it positively and they believed that it was God's provision for them. A week ago, I knew that he was going to present this to the congregation and that's why I asked us to pray, because I didn't know what was going to happen. And I've got to tell you that after I preached at our Potomac Yard location, I got in my car and drove down to Barracks Row and I walked down that alley and I laid hands on the doors of that church and I prayed for him. And it wasn't about how is this going to go, it was, I have a friend who, right now, is risking his leadership to cast a vision, and I prayed that God would anoint him and show them and I promise you before the Lord that when this first started, maybe it was about geography or finances or us finding a place, maybe it was about us, but the

point came where I knew it wasn't about us and I told them, if this is not a win for you, it is not a win for us. If it is not what is best for you, it is not what is best for us. So I prayed. Sunday night, their board unanimously decided to sell the People's Church to us.

I wondered, God, is this going to take a year? Because we knew, they told me and I'd been praying and I had asked our realtor to help because they needed to find a location near where most of their congregation lives and I knew it had to be perfect. I didn't want them to settle for second best. Do you know that in a couple days' time, they found an unbelievable piece of property on Ranch Avenue, the main artery that goes right through their county in the vicinity where most of them live in an unbelievable location? So on Wednesday when we sat down in my office to sign the contract, while we are getting ready to sign the contract, they get a phone call from their realtor, and that piece of property that was for sale for \$795,000, the owner came down to \$420,000. I want to tell you that God has not confirmed this in a hundred ways, He has confirmed it in 375,000 ways! Praise the Lord! It could have happened before they came to that meeting. It could have happened after, but I think it was God's way of saying, 'Watch this, I'm going to confirm it, I'm going to do it when you are all together.' And we praised the Lord together.

I want to tell you what has happened. Six weeks ago, I thought to myself, 'Lord thank You for Virginia Avenue, but Lord it is going to take three or four years for us to build that thing so that we can then continue to grow as a church.' And it's like, God said, 'Watch this. It's not going to take three or four years, it is going to take three or four weeks.' And the Phase I building is already built! It was designed for you in 1910 when the theater bought a dance hall and gutted it and turned it into a movie theater, and it has since been four different movie theaters and in 1962, the People's Church bought it, and on June 1<sup>st</sup>, we will own it. My friends, this is not a miracle, it is a double miracle. It is as much a miracle for them as it is for us, because on June 1<sup>st</sup>, all of their debt will be paid off. They will have plenty of cash to buy an unbelievable piece of property to build a church. And you want to know what they told me as we signed that contract? They said the thing that brings them the most joy is that they have always had a heart for missions that for the last few years, because of the recession, they have not been able to give, and now they can start giving to missions again. This is not a win, it is a win win. This is not a miracle, this is a miracle miracle.

So, how about some show and tell? Let me show you a couple of pictures real quick. The first picture is the old façade of the old theater. We think this was taken in 1914. We are going to go through these quickly. I love this picture. You tell me, everybody who sees that picture is like, is he seriously 71? That's one reason I call him Caleb. He is well kept! Here's a picture from 1962 of a revival that took place. Here's a fish-eye view of the front of the theater as it is now. Here's a shot of the inside. Here's the deal, we are going to look with some eyes of imagination. We realize it needs some acoustic treatments and it needs some theater treatments and I'll tell you a little bit of what we plan on doing, but it is a beautiful place. We will lower the stage a little bit. These are the 1929 theater seats and they are more narrow but they are comfortable! There you have it.

A couple of quick questions, when will we make the move? We are going to launch a 9:00 a.m. service on Palm Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>! They had graciously said, 'Come on, we don't have to go to

settlement, you need it, use it!’ We said to them, ‘We are going to honor you, as long as you need this space.’ They plan to build a church building but they want to find rented facilities in that vicinity sooner than later. They can meet in that space until Jesus returns if that’s what they want because we are going to honor them. But the truth is, they want to get where God is calling them, but we will do our Good Friday service at the People’s Church because we want all of our locations to be able to experience that. It will be an amazing Friday night, Good Friday.

How many seats? Interestingly, it was a 600 seat theater. They took out a few rows to make more stage and they closed up the balcony, and we’re not sure everything we are going to do but it is 311 seats and it would be easy to get to 350, so that means we can fit 700 people! Ha ha! Free parking on Sunday two blocks away, plenty of spaces, and if those aren’t enough, our property is three blocks away. I’m sure before we break ground, we can make a parking lot out of it. What will we do with the theater? We are going to have some fun! All I know is we believe the church ought to be in the middle of the marketplace and we are not going to use it just once a week, that I promise you. We do happen to have a coffeehouse where the church happens to meet on the weekends and that’s our approach to ministry. We know the community has been begging for a theater in Barracks Row. I don’t know. That thing has shown everything from silent films to westerns, you name it. I don’t think it is a coincidence that I put my faith in Christ after watching a movie. We will find some way to creatively serve the community, serve the kingdom, and some pretty cool things are going to happen.

So, we have more questions than answers but we will do some things with it.

How much will it cost? Thanks for asking! 3 million dollars. And here’s what I love about it – it is a reinvestment in the kingdom of God! Isn’t that awesome! So it doesn’t cost a penny, it is free! It is an investment in the kingdom of God. We are replanting a church in PG County, that’s what we are doing. We are going to invest 3 million dollars in that church.

Can you handle one more miracle? Within 24 hours of signing that contract, 1.5 million dollars was pledged as a matching gift.

I’ve lost track of how many miracles that is. Please listen to me, this is crazy! The greatest danger that we face as a church right now is taking for granted the miracles that God is doing. The favor of God, we prayed for it, we ought to expect it, but I don’t know that I expected it to the degree we have experienced it. We better stay humble and we better steward it. I told Pastor Hall, ‘We receive the mantel that you are passing to us.’ He point blank said, ‘Mark, you guys are reaching people in this community, and we can reach people in PG County, so we want you to come in and preach the gospel in a way that people are going to hear it.’ That’s the miracle. The miracle is not the building, the miracle is one person coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That is the miracle. This is going to position us to reach people in a powerful way.

So, when we launch a location, we take an offering and believe that God is going to provide. Last May, we took a miracle offering, launched Potomac Yard, one offering, you gave more than \$100,000, done, in one offering, we raised enough money to launch that location and God is doing amazing things at Potomac Yard. We have never purchased a building for as a launch but we are half way there. Here’s what I believe – we have until August 31 when the promissory

note is due on that property to match that 1.5 million dollar gift, and I for one, I want to get in on one of these miracles. Lora and I are ready to go all in. There are so many miracles happening and I want to get in on it. That's the spirit of Caleb. Caleb is like, 'Give me my share of the promise!' I don't want to just watch all of this happening, I want to be a shareholder in the miracles.

So, this may be the least planned, worst planned capital campaign in the history of Christendom, but I could care less because God is moving. And somehow, some way, before August 31<sup>st</sup>, we are going to walk into that property and it is going to be debt-free. If all of us go all in, we will be good to go. So, Palm Sunday, the weekend we move in and have our first service, we are going to take a miracle offering. That gives you three weeks to pray about it. And in the spirit of this series, let's see what God does. Then we are going to give you an opportunity to make a four-month pledge, that before August 31<sup>st</sup>, God would put something in your heart that you are willing to give. And together I believe that we are going to experience a wonderful miracle. Here's what I loved about it. I better say this one more time to make sure we are all on the same page, you aren't just giving to National Community Church, you are giving to the People's Church. I don't even know what to call it, double dividend? It is an investment in two churches and I believe God is going to honor it and bless it.

Alright, here is the back story, are you still with me? You have no idea how hard it was to condense it down to the Reader's Digest version. Real quickly, in 1960, an evangelist by the name of R.W. Schambach preached a revival in Washington D.C. for Fred and Charlotte Hall. One night, after one of those meetings, they went over to a theater on 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Fred and Charlotte said, 'We believe God wants us to have this theater,' and they laid hands on it and prayed that God would give it to them. Two years later, they purchased that theater. For 49 years, they have served the community and served God faithfully. But they prayed one other prayer and Pastor Hall told this to me after the whole thing of the potential nightclub coming in and God convicted them and showed them and reminded them of another prayer that Schambach prayed. He prayed that that building, that property would always serve God's purposes. I believe, and he believed it was a binding prayer. I believe, as he believes that this was part of God's plan from the very beginning, that we would step into that property and serve the purposes of God.

Here's one of the revelations we've had this week, as our staff went over to see the new building and to pray. As we laid hands on the walls, we were overcome by the sweet presence in that place. There are some saints of God that have brought down heaven with their prayers over the years. There are people who have knelt at those altars and people who have prayed like you wouldn't believe. It is a praying church. In fact, they almost called it the House of Prayer. Their history is our history now and our history is theirs. As we were praying, there was this moment, we are inheriting all of those prayers. I don't care, you know the word 'convey' when you buy property, what does convey and what doesn't, I don't care about any physical piece of property that conveys but the prayers convey! The prayers convey and so do the visions. Pastor Hall told me that one day about 10 years ago he had a vision. Here's what he said. He said young people were raising their hands in worship and packing the theater all the way out the front door. He said I thought that was for us, but now I realize it was for you. This is Elijah Elisha. There is something happening in the spiritual realm and all we can do is simply humbly receive a mantle

that has been given to us and we need to steward it and we need to serve the purposes of God in that place.

What does that have to do with Caleb? That's the longest illustration I think I've ever told to actually make a point. Pastor Hall has told me, they love Barracks Row, the restaurants, eating here and hanging out here. We know how strategic this property is and we know it is a cool place to be. 71 years old, he could have just played it safe. His parents started the church. He's been there 49 years. I don't just have a friend, I have a hero. You are 71 years old and you are willing to put Isaac on the altar. You are 71 years old and you are still saying, 'Give me the hill country!' He said we are going to go plant a church! 71 years old! May God inspire us to have the spirit of Caleb to walk into that place with the same spirit in which they are walking into God's plans and purposes for them.

All I ask this weekend is this – would you join me in praying for them? Last Saturday night, Parker and I went down to the Blockbuster on 8<sup>th</sup> Street next to the Firehouse and we walked over to the church and it was packed, all the sidewalk cafes, and I wanted to take him over there because every time I'm over there, I want to pray for them. So we just stood there, and it was real indiscreet, well, the most discreet laying on of hands you've ever seen, we just kind of leaned back against the building like this. I was like, Parker, I know a bunch of people are walking by and we don't need to make a scene but we need to lay hands and pray for them because I knew this was going down the next day. So we were like we were having a conversation. 'God, bless them, anoint them, guide them.' I prayed for supernatural unity for them and I prayed that God would order their footsteps and that they would find joy in this.

All In Sermon 4: Alabaster Jar, 30 Pieces of Silver, and the Cross  
*Mark Batterson*

If you have a Bible, turn over to Matthew 26. We are going to read a lot of Scripture this weekend and I think that's ok because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it is where we anchor our faith. So we are going to read quite a bit of Scripture and unpack it together. I'll give you a minute to get there.

This weekend, we wrap up our 'All In' series. This is a tough one to end because I think all of us have been challenged. I don't know about you, but I want to continue to be challenged. So we've given you pictures of what it looks like to go all in with God, to push all your chips to the middle of the table and say, 'God I belong to you.' What does that look like? Well, for a guy named Noah, it was building an ark in the middle of the desert. For a guy named Abraham, it was putting his son Isaac on the altar and offering what was most precious to him to God. For Elisha, it was slaughtering his oxen and following the calling that God had placed on his life. Then remember last week, don't you love Dick Foth! Going all in as a little boy saying, 'Here are five loaves and two fish, it's all I've got but you can have what is in my hand.' And Jesus takes those five loaves and two fish and He does what He does, miracles, and He feeds 5,000. But more than anything else, going all in looks like the sinless Son of God hanging on an old rugged cross offering his life as a sacrifice for our forgiveness and our freedom. It is not about what we can do for God, it is about what He has already done for us.

Do you know that many religions are about what you can do for God or what you have to do for God? But Christianity is all about what God the Father has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. So you could say that religion is spelled D-O do, but I think you could also say that Christianity is spelled D-O-N-E. It was done at the cross and with the resurrection that God accomplished his purposes and all we have to do is receive it. So this is almost the trick right here to living a life where you follow Christ. It is understanding that it doesn't start with what you can do for God, it starts with what God has done for you. So when you begin to realize that He loves you, then you start loving other people the way He loves you. And your life becomes an expression of who God is. Essentially, you begin to do what God has done for you. It really is as simple as that. So us going all in is a response to the God who has gone all in for us.

Let me be up front, I want to challenge you to completely submit your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. By the time we're done, if you are holding out, you are missing out. I want you to experience the fullness of joy and the fulfillment that comes when you begin to give your life to the One who has plans and purposes for you that are way beyond anything you can ask or imagine. He demands and deserves nothing less.

Matthew 26 starting in verse 6. We are going to read four or five vignettes, if you will, and I want to start with verse 6 because I think this is a beautiful picture of what it looks like to go all in.

[Read Matthew 6.6-13]

How cool is that! What she did is being celebrated 2,000 years later. We don't know the exact value of this alabaster jar, but it was enough to shock the disciples. In fact, they call it a waste. It is so shocking that it had to be extremely valuable. This was the most valuable thing she owned. In fact, I would suggest that this alabaster jar of perfume probably represented her life savings. And that is significant. She wasn't just pouring perfume on Jesus, what was she doing? She was giving her life to Jesus. She was offering her life to Jesus.

At the end of our services this weekend, we will take a miracle offering. We take a special offering every time we launch a new location. And we call it a miracle offering because we believe that it is going to translate into miracles in people's lives. I believe that, I believe it, I believe it. In fact, this weekend, I went over to the People's Church and I walked every aisle and I laid hands on every seat and I began to pray that the people who sit in those seats would experience miracles, that someone would sit in one of those seats and experience a healing touch from God. How exciting is that? People are going to be seated in those seats and for the first time, they are going to trade their spiritual genealogy back to that place because in one of those seats, they are going to find a relationship with Christ. We've done that at all of our locations, so no matter where you are sitting, you are in a chair that was prayed for! We don't believe that anybody walks in our doors by accident. You are a divine appointment. You are here for a reason and if we can get out of the way, I believe you can meet God in an incredible way. So, we want to give everybody an opportunity to be part of this miracle offering.

I want to make an observation. Two weeks ago, I was blown away because we had a guest in one of our services that was so impacted by the double miracle that God has done, which I shared a few weeks ago, this person wrote a \$10,000 check! They don't even attend our church! I'm like, seriously! It impacted me for a couple of reasons. One, the fact that they aren't even part of our congregation and they would make that kind of investment was a tremendous confirmation that, wow, God thank You for the way you are working and that even those who aren't part of this thing called National Community Church can see that you are moving in incredible ways. The other reason it impacted me is for this specific reason, I know that they dipped into life savings to give that gift. What does that have to do with this? Aren't they breaking open their alabaster jar of perfume? Call it whatever you want but isn't that what they are doing? They are saying, 'I'm going to give myself to this thing,' and they are pouring it out at the feet of Christ. I want to make the simple observation about giving that could revolutionize the way you think about it because it has changed the way I think about it.

Here's what I believe, when you give you aren't giving money, you are giving your life. Why? Because what happens for most of us is every week, we get up on Monday morning and we go to a place, sometimes called an office, and at that place we trade our life, somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 hours unless a government shutdown is threatened and in that case, it might be more than that, but on any given week, you are trading 40, 50, 60 hours of your life for something called a paycheck. You get a paycheck. We are trading our life, so if you make \$1,000 a week, when you give \$1,000, you are not giving \$1,000, you are giving a week of your life back to God. You are trading your life for a paycheck and here's the beautiful thing, I believe that all of us, whatever we are doing, I hope that you feel like God has called you to that thing.

Now, I'm not saying that every job I've had, I've jumped up and down and said, 'I am serving!' When I was a ditch-digger, it was hard to find a lot of eternal perspective in that. I pumped gas, that was my first job, I had this brown uniform. Then I was a painter one summer. I got fired. My boss called it downsizing but when you are the only person that got downsized... So it's not like every job I've ever done has had this inherent value where I see spiritual significance, but I've made a choice that I'm going to glorify God with a great attitude no matter what I'm doing. So whatever you are doing, I hope that you are not just trading your life for a paycheck and there is no meaning to what you are doing, please tell me that's not the case. Whatever you are doing, you need to do it for the glory of God. But then there is this double bonus where you are giving your life to serve God, then in that paycheck, you have another opportunity to glorify God as well.

So, as we take this miracle offering, God doesn't need your money, we don't need your money, but He does want your heart and the Bible says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So when we give, we are giving our heart and our life and somehow, in God's providence, I have found that He uses that. He uses that in my life. So when we give these gifts at the end of this service, I hope you see it as an alabaster jar of perfume. Don't view it as something that is less than what it is. We have the opportunity to go all in and do what Christ called us to do and what this woman models for us.

It is interesting to me, how ironic that the very next vignette, first we have this woman who goes all in, breaks open her alabaster jar of perfume and pours it on Jesus, here's what happens next. Verse 14

*<sup>14</sup> Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.*

Would it be fair to say that Judas wasn't all in? Can I just put this in monetary terms? I hate to reduce a relationship with God to this but it sure seems to me like Jesus wasn't worth 30 silver coins to Judas. I'll let that just set out there. What a contrast to someone who is breaking open life savings and pouring it on Jesus to someone else who opts out, isn't all in but opts out for 30 silver coins.

[Read Matthew 26.17-30

Here's what's so powerful about this to me. Picture Da Vinci's painting if you need to, the Last Supper, the 12 disciples around the table, but to me the powerful thing is not just 11 that drink the cup or take the bread, Jesus offers it to all of them, even the one that He knows will betray Him. Maybe you've felt like you are unworthy to take communion or go to the Lord's table, can I just say that, you probably shouldn't make this comparison, but if Jesus is inviting Judas to the table, you have a shot! Here's the deal, you are here this weekend and you feel like your world is falling apart, you are in the right place. You came to the right place. If you feel like you've ruined a relationship or you've made mistakes or there are some habitual sins in your life that you can't seem to win the victory over and every time it comes time for communion, you feel this overwhelming unworthiness to even be at the table, it's because we have a false understanding. We think we've got to get our act together and then come to Christ. Seriously?

That is like saying once I get well, then I'll go to the hospital. It makes no sense at all. This is a place where we come and we acknowledge our sinfulness but we celebrate the forgiveness of God. There is not one of us that deserve to be at the table. We aren't there because we deserve it. All of us have betrayed Him. We are there because God doesn't have a love that reacts to how we are acting, God has a love that is proactive. We don't have to change for God to love us, his love changes us. His love begins to do a work in our hearts and lives and it changes us from the inside out and we become a different person.

I want to tell you that it wasn't nails that kept Him nailed to that cross. It was his love for you. He wasn't willing to come off that cross because He wasn't willing to let go of you. And until you personalize that, you'll never have the kind of experience when you come to the Lord's Table. I hope that it is not diminished by the fact that maybe you are taking it with a couple hundred people at whatever location you are at. Maybe when it was 12, it felt like He loves you one-twelfth, but maybe you feel like God loves you one-two hundredth or whatever, no, no, no. He would have died for you if it was only you. That's not a cliché. We've got to personalize that because when we do, it begins to change us because we begin to understand how much He loves us.

[Read Matthew 26.36-46]

What is Jesus referring to when He reference the cup? Please dial in because if you've never heard this before, it will change the way you take communion. You need to understand this to have a full understanding of what the cup represents. Jesus is alluding to the cup of wrath, sometimes it is called the cup of sorrow in the Old Testament. It is referenced in multiple different places but what it symbolizes is our punishment for sin, that when we sin, the punishment is this cup of wrath that we must drink. And everyone must drink it. But Jesus drank it for us.

We go back to Isaiah 51, verse 17 and verse 22

*Awake, awake, rise up O Jerusalem. You who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained it to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.*

Let me summarize, you don't want to drink this! This is what you don't want to drink, the cup of wrath.

Verse 21

*Therefore, hear this, you afflicted one made drunk but not with wine. This is what your sovereign Lord says, your God who defends his people, "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger, from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, [are you ready for this? It doesn't get much better than this.] You will never drink again.*

The prophet Isaiah is talking about this cup of wrath, that he is looking forward to the day that Jesus Christ would drink it for us so that we never have to drink it again.

Here's the connection. Have you ever noticed in I Corinthians 11 as you read the account of communion there what the communion cup is called? It is called the cup of thanksgiving. I think

that this is one of those beautiful pictures where you have two cups, a cup of wrath and a cup of thanksgiving, and Jesus does this thing and says, 'Let me drink the cup of wrath to its dregs so that you can drink the cup of thanksgiving.'

Are you grateful today? Are you grateful today that He took our place, that He drank the cup that we deserve?

This week, Lora and I were in California. I spoke to some pastors in Sacramento and then we had a day with no agenda. Those days are few and far between. We hung out with Scott and Sue Ottman who were on our staff years ago and went sent them to plant a church in Pal Alto, California, so they hung out with us and we drove from Sacramento down to San Francisco. Lora had never been so I wanted to take her there. We made the drive and had a blast and hung out at Pier 39 and ate at the Stinking Rose. We walked the city and drove down the crookedest street. But on the way from Sacramento to San Francisco, this totally unplanned, but they said, 'Do you know we are driving through Napa Valley?' So we went up Route 29 and we drove through Napa Valley and we stopped at a winery to take a tour. So we went through and in the cellar they had their big casks of wine, and they had wine sampling. Here's the deal about wine sampling, in my expert experience, they just give you a little bit. I don't even know if it qualifies as a sip! What is smaller than a sip? Is there a word in the English language that is less than a sip? A drop? So people are there doing this thing and I was chuckling because I'd never had that experience before and it was interesting for me to see it. I shared that as a picture because I wonder how many of us have only sipped the grace of God. We've only just had a little sip of his love. We've only tasted just a smidgen of his power and we don't even know what we are missing.

When I read this, part of what catches me in Isaiah is this little phrase 'drained to its dregs.' I don't know why I like the word 'dregs,' it almost feels manly saying it, like a pirate. Dregs are what are left when you have drunk everything in the cup. It is the remains. It is when everything is gone but just that little residue that's left. Jesus didn't just sip the cup of wrath, He drank it to its dregs, every sin that all of us collectively throughout history, Jesus drained that cup of wrath to its dregs. What does that mean? I think what that means is we better drink the cup of thanksgiving to its dregs. That's all He wants! It is not what we can do for Him, it is us having a heart that is so overwhelmed with gratitude for what God has done that we drink that cup of thanksgiving and we drink it to its dregs and we say thank you God.

The Bible says do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit. You know what I think that means? Let me put it in plain terms. I think some of us, when we worship God, we have never worshipped God without inhibitions because we've never gotten drunk on the Spirit of God. We have never been so intoxicated with the love of God that could care less what other people think. You know me well enough to know what I'm saying. I'm saying that I just felt so strongly in my spirit that God wants to keep taking me to a new place. I am hungry for God to do new things in my life. I want to experience Him in new ways and that means I can't just do what I've always done. I've got to get on my knees and seek God in a fresh way if I want a fresh experience with Him. I've got to drink the cup of thanksgiving to its dregs. I need God's Spirit to fill cavities in my heart that I didn't even know were there and then I need God to expand my

capacity so that I can be filled with his Spirit and He can do something through me that I can't take credit for.

Are you hungry for that? Are you willing to go to that place? Is there any place that you shouldn't be willing to go to if Christ was willing to go to Calvary? It is disingenuous to say to the God who walked and carried that cross to Calvary, to say, 'I'm not willing to go there?' It doesn't work that way. If He was willing to go there, then I better be willing to go here, there and everywhere because He demands it.

I don't know what God is demanding of you, but He gave everything, and that means we better give ourselves back to Him.

I'm going to close with this. Here is what I believe, I believe this is a moment for some of you. I want to challenge you to make a defining decision. I want to challenge you to make a daily decision. Let me summarize this, I don't think we make too many major decisions in our lives but we spend the rest of our lives managing those major decisions. So there are a few defining decisions that will forever change the trajectory of our lives. That doesn't need to scare us because God goes before us and He is ordering our footsteps. So you can live in holy anticipation. You don't have to worry about it if you're walking the path that God has laid out for you. But you still have to make those defining decisions. There is a defining decision above all others and it's the decision to bow your knee and kneel at the foot of the cross and submit your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to acknowledge that He is who He said He was. That's a defining decision. Many of us have made that decision. Some of you, I challenge you to make that decision today.

Then what? Then come the daily decisions. Our destiny is as much defined by daily decisions as it is by defining decisions. It is about living it out. So here's what it means to follow Christ in a nutshell. You make a defining decision where you bow the knee and you submit your life to Christ. Then you get up and you make a daily decision today, tomorrow and the next day, to take up the cross that you have knelt before and to carry it. What does that mean? That's what Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." In other words, 'I went all in for you, now you go all in for me.' And if you go all in for God, your life will never be the same. Let's pray.