



TIME OF GRACE®

Less Me: More Me Makes a Mess

Study Notes

Summary

The Son of God wasn't born in a palace. The Prince of peace did not grow up next to a throne. The King of kings spent his life in dusty streets and common villages. Why would Jesus choose such a humble home?

- More me makes a _____. Less me makes us _____.
- The key to less _____ is more _____.
- **Matthew 4:12,13:** ¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—
- **John 7:52:** They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”
- 1st—Judah (802)
2nd—Dan (189)
3rd—Ephraim (167)
4th—Manasseh (136)
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9th-12th—Naphtali (50), Simeon (48), Zebulun (48), Issachar (41)
- **Matthew 4:12-16:** ¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:
 - ¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
 - ¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”

- The Point: Jesus is _____ enough to be _____.
- **Matthew 4:17:** From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Points to Ponder

1. Which versions of pride cause the biggest messes in your life? What would life look like if God helped you to be a more humble person?
2. **Evaluate:** Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less.
3. **Read Philippians 2:5-11.** Find at least three examples of the stunning humility of Jesus.

Homework for Next Week

Read Matthew 8:18-22.

Time of Grace Ministry
Less Me: More Me Makes a Mess
Matthew 4:12-17
January 17, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

And the bad news I have to share with you today is that more me makes a mess and here's the worst news I have to share with you: There's no place that you can get away from it.

So if there is one prayer that I could pray and I would be guaranteed that God would answer yes, this would be my prayer: "Father, bless me with less me." In fact, if there's one prayer that I could pray for you, for us, for our church, for all of you watching at home, it would be, "Father, bless us with less us."

I'm getting to be about 40 years old. In fact, I was mentoring a kid the other day at an elementary school and I bent down and he said, "What's wrong with your hair?" And I said, "It's gone gray since I started hanging out with you." And the older I get and the longer I'm a parent, the longer I'm a pastor, the longer I'm a husband, the more I realize that the simple sentence that I'm about to put on the screen is absolutely true. And if you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write this down. I have learned that more me makes a mess but less me makes us blessed.

When we think at church, at school, at recess, in a relationship, with your little sister, your older brother how I feel and what I want to get done and my plans and my timeline, it almost invariably becomes a mess really fast. It's one of the hardest things about life to be humble and it's one of the most dangerous things to not be. The bad news I have to share with you today is that more me makes a mess and here's the worse news I have to share with you - there's no place that you can get away from it. It doesn't matter your gender, your age, your calling, it doesn't matter what school you go to, what career you pick, what church you attend. When you walk into any given room, the temptation to focus on more you will always be there. Some theologians have said that pride is the sin behind every single sin. Every struggle you have at its very root is a struggle with you and pride. It's the monster and murderer that wears a thousand different masks and it's why all of us have to take this message so seriously.

In fact, the other day, I tried to make a list of all the ways that pride manifests itself in our life and this is going to be depressing but I have to share it with you, okay? There's this arrogant kind of pride; it's the ridiculously talented wide-receiver who always wants the ball. And there's a very insecure kind of pride that throws pity parties and sucks all the optimism out of the room. There's a loud kind of pride that dominates conversations and adds another story and, "That reminds me of something else that happened to me!" And there's a quiet kind of pride that never contributes, never adds anything, and just quietly judges all the people in the room. There's male pride, "Women, am I right guys?" And there's female pride, "Boys are the worst," right, girls? There's the pride of youth, "I know, Dad, I'm fourteen." And there's the pride of old age, "What do you know? You've only been working here a year." There's the pride of little toddlers who won't accept help to tie their shoes. And the pride of the elderly who won't accept the same

when their bodies are failing. Which leaves us with a huge question: So how do we get rid of pride? What's your plan?

Last week, I was listening to a podcast and I heard a really insightful answer to that question. Here's what the preacher said. He said, imagine your sin, your pride, like air in an empty cup. How are you going to get the air out? He said, you know what you could do? You could vacuum suction all of it out, right? We could seal off the glass, find some device - whoosh. Or, he suggested, we could pick up a pitcher of water - glub, glub, glub - and push out the pride. And that is exactly what I hope to do with you. For the next few weeks, we're going to talk a ton about pride but, you know, pride is such a tricky thing. It's not always just thinking too much of yourself; sometimes it's just thinking of yourself too much. And so we're going to take our eyes off of ourselves for a while and fix them on Jesus; on the humility of Jesus, the compassion of Jesus, the love of Jesus, and the forgiveness of Jesus. We're going to talk about Jesus' humble words, his humble home, his humble friendships, his humble work, his humble service and especially, his humble cross. I'm going to give you homework to study the humility of Jesus because my hope is as we pour more and more of the shocking humility of our Savior, it will push out of our hearts any degree of feeling like we deserve it; any ounce of pride.

Now today, we're going to start with a part of the Bible that when I read it, I don't think anyone's going to say, "Amen! It's my life first, Pastor. Preach!" But don't fall asleep on me because what I'm about to share with you is so, so, so, so, so, so good. So here it is, Matthew 4, we find these words: "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison," - that's his relative, John the Baptist - "he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which is by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali." The area of Galilee where Jesus lived was the northernmost region of the ancient land of Israel. Now, let me show you a map real quickly. I sometimes think of Israel as like this big ice cream cone on the bottom of desert, stacked with these three scoops of regions - Judea, that's where Jerusalem was, Samaria, in the middle, and then Galilee, way up in the north. And what you should know about Galilee is that it wasn't the - it wasn't the sexiest place to live in ancient Israel. You know, important people, rich people, influential people, they lived in Judea, in Jerusalem, near the temple, like God's holy hot spot. But up in Galilee? Up in Galilee was like living in North Dakota or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan or the north woods of Wisconsin. Some of you are from the UP and you're giving me a look right now but I was watching an interview with David Letterman and Jeff Daniels today on YouTube and they were totally ripping on people who come from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan; like you know, it's flyover country, right? Important people, we live in Miami and L.A. and Chicago and New York or D.C., but there? That's like living in Galilee.

In fact, when the rumors about Jesus - this Messiah, or Savior, coming from Galilee - were starting to spread, this is one of the responses in John 7. "Look into it," the religious leader said, "and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." Now if that weren't humble enough, Matthew 4 says that Galilee was in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. All right, this is like Bible 201, okay? Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the 12 ancient tribes of Israel. Go way, way back to the story of Abraham and then Isaac and then there was a guy named Jacob who got the nickname Israel, he had 12 sons and the land ended up being divided into those 12 regions. And I did some super nerdy Bible research this week. I typed into a Bible search engine the names of all 12 of those sons, all the regions, and I wanted to see where Zebulun and Naphtali

showed up. Let me show you my research. I found out that in first place was the tribe of Judah; that's where Jerusalem was - 802 mentions in the Bible. Second place was Dan, 189. Third place was Ephraim, 167. Fourth place was Manasseh, 136 total mentions. And do you want to know where Zebulun and Naphtali were? Not fifth or sixth or seventh or eighth. No, go all the way to the bottom third of the list and here's what you find. In the entire Bible, Naphtali's mentioned only 50 times and Zebulun in 11th place with 48. So what? Well, next time we're in Bible trivia, I'll tell them Naphtali is mentioned 48 times in the Bible. Thank you, Pastor.

Okay, you came to church today, your time is valuable, why does any of this matter to you? I'll tell you with a picture and a story. The picture behind me is of the city of San Francisco. About a year ago, my wife and I were thinking about taking a vacation and we said, "Where should we go?" And we thought, well, let's try San Francisco. What we didn't realize at the time that we made that decision is that San Francisco is the most expensive place in the United States to be a tourist. And so my search for a hotel has been rather complicated. You might know a little bit about San Francisco. There's some really beautiful rich parts because of Silicon Valley and there's some really, really gritty, dangerous parts. Homelessness is rampant, a lot of mental health issues, drugs, prostitution, places you do not want to stay and that's where the cheap hotels are. And so, I have to make the decision, right? Do I want to save some money and be in the darker part of the city? Do I have enough money to be in the really safe part of the city? Now think about Jesus. Where does he live in Israel? The safe, glamorous part? No, the dark and dangerous part. Because he's broke? No, he's God. He owns everything. Every ounce of silver and gold is his. He could construct a mansion by speaking it into existence so why in the world is Jesus in that place? Well, that's where the good news is for today. Listen to the answer from Matthew's gospel - back to Matthew 4: "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which is by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali." Why? Here's the answer: "To fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah." Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. Grab a pen and write down the big idea for today. The point is that Jesus is humble enough to be here.

If you're here live with me today, you probably have an accent. You don't know it but travel a little bit and you'll find out that you do. Spend some time with people on the coast, watch how they dress and their fashion, and you'll find out that we're not the most glamorous here in the Midwest. And yet, what do we learn? That doesn't bother Jesus. Maybe you're from the north woods; maybe you're the kind of guy that doesn't really know how to tie a tie. Maybe you don't have flawless skin and a wrinkle-free face. Maybe you don't have a glamorous job; maybe you have a mediocre relationship, mediocre bank account. It doesn't bother Jesus. Maybe like Zebulun and Naphtali, you didn't finish first in your class or second or third or seventh or eighth. Maybe you've never impressed people. Maybe you never turned a head. Maybe you've never been first place at the race, first in line to be hired. It doesn't bother Jesus. Maybe you come from generational dysfunction, maybe you weren't raised in the lap of a loving father who read you Bible stories about Jesus. It doesn't bother Jesus. Maybe your parent's relationship was kind of messed up; maybe there's alcohol abuse in your family. Maybe there's been some really dark parts of your past. It doesn't bother Jesus. Maybe you hear the good news of the gospel that through the blood of Jesus you get to be in the presence of God and it almost seems

unbelievable; like a prophet coming out of Galilee or the Messiah being raised in Nazareth. But people's objections don't bother Jesus. Maybe your morality is a lot like the Sea of Galilee; some days you're a pretty good person, everything is calm and beautiful, but then just out of nowhere, that temptation comes, that person sets you off and it's violent and it's ugly, it's dangerous. It doesn't bother Jesus. No, the beauty of Jesus' address is that it means people like us have a chance. If Jesus would have moved out of Mary's house right into the temple itself, into the most holy place, all of us would have thought, "I wonder if he'll ever be here with me?" But if Jesus chooses Galilee and Nazareth, Capernaum, Zebulun, Naphtali and a little house by the sea, then all of us can know that maybe there is a chance. Maybe Jesus is humble enough to be here with me in my life and in my heart.

He is! And he has something to say to you. It's the last verse from our text for today. Matthew 4:17, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" Before I say amen, there's two things I need to tell you about the kingdom of heaven. Thing number one: In the kingdom of heaven, there is a king and it's not you. If you would go up to the gate of the kingdom of heaven and knock and say, "Hello, I'm here." And they say, "Who are you?" "I'm the king." "No, you're not." In the kingdom of heaven, you can't get through the door still wearing a crown and you can't drag your big throne through the gates; it won't fit. In the kingdom of heaven, there's only one person who gets the last word and he is the Lord and it's not the reflection you see in the mirror each day. And if I'm going to be like really raw and transparent with you, this is actually the thing that keeps most people from becoming or staying Christians because if you believe it's your body, your money, your time, your sexuality, your schedule, your life, you can't get into the kingdom of heaven. There is only one king, one set of rules, and this king is not looking for your advice. If you want to hold on to what you think, how you feel, what you feel is right, you can't get into the kingdom of heaven. You can't do what you want with your words, with your dollars, your cents, your bank account, your retirement, your body, your baby, your anything. They're not your kids in the kingdom of heaven. It's not your career in the kingdom of heaven. Nothing belongs to you - you have to lose your entire life and crawl on your face to get into that place.

And that's why most people don't get there. Do you know what Jesus once said about his hometown, Capernaum? That it was worse than Sodom because there Jesus lived for three years, there he taught. His light shone in that dark place. He did miracles. He drove out their demons. He befriended their tax collectors and sinners and at the end of the day, do you know what happened? They didn't want a king. The people of Capernaum wanted the last word about their lives and they missed out on the kingdom of heaven.

So here's my honest question for you: What will you do? Will you tell Jesus to wait at your table? Will you proudly think that holding onto your life is worth throwing away your eternity? Will you tell Jesus to do your will, your kingdom, your glory, and your power? You can. Many people do; most people do. Or will you listen to Jesus and repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near?

Before you decide, I should tell you the second thing about the kingdom of heaven. The king of the kingdom of heaven is the king of heaven. Once you get into that kingdom, this king, Jesus, will use all of his royal power. Not like the kings of earth - he will humbly use it to serve and

protect and love and forgive you. The walls of the kingdom of heaven are so strong and powerful that all of your sin, all of your shame, all the stuff that would condemn you, it can't break through. The devil himself can prowl around outside the walls but he can't jump over them; they're too tall. And he can accuse you and tell you that you're too sinful, too broken, too unworthy, but he can't touch you in the kingdom of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven, you can die. You can suffer. But even death can't separate you from the king of love and seeing his beautiful face for all of eternity. In the kingdom of heaven, there is compassion and there is love. There is forgiveness and there is grace. We walk around free in the kingdom of heaven knowing that there's nothing that has happened or will ever happen that can tear us away from the gorgeous face of our heavenly Father. To get into the kingdom, you have to lose your life. But once you're in the kingdom, you have a life that never, ever, ever ends.

Do you know how I know that? Because Jesus didn't stay in Galilee. Three years after he moved in, he took a trip to the south. He passed through Samaria, he made it to Judea, he got right up next to the temple. And there they made a sign for him. It said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king." And do you know where they put the sign? Above his cross where our King Jesus used all of his authority, all of his divine power, and all of his love to spread out his arms on a cross and open the kingdom and bring it here.

So I beg you today, do not be afraid of humbling yourself. God gives grace to the humble. God gives salvation to the humble. God gives unending love to the humble. Don't hold onto something so small when Jesus wants to offer you forever; forever with God.

About 80 years ago, there was a woman named Hilda and she met a very famous American Christian celebrity; his name was Walter Maier. Before Billy Graham became famous for preaching Jesus on the television, Walter Maier was famous for preaching Jesus on the radio. He was insanely talented. In his doctoral dissertation, he translated some Hebrew and ancient Semitic languages in such an impressive way that those who were analyzing him were shocked they never heard a translation so good. He was wonderful with his words. He was persuasive with his voice. He was a powerful preacher and a sharp mind but when Hilda met him, what she noticed was not all that, but his humble heart. One time, a reporter went to see Walter Maier filming live for his radio program and the one who gave the tour pointed behind the glass and said, "There's Dr. Maier in the studio." And the reporter said, "I don't see him." And he said, "Look closer." And the reporter approached the glass and looked down and there was Dr. Maier, the most famous Christian in the world, on his face, praying for God's help. And when this young woman named Hilda met him, when she saw up close his humility, she said these words, "To a man like that, I could give my life." And she did. Walter and Hilda were soon married and had a wonderful marriage together. And that's just like Jesus. It might scare you to go all in with him but come close. Don't look down and see him on his face; look up and see the King on a cross and your heart, by the power of the Spirit, will say to a man like that, I could give up my life. And you'll never regret it. Less me makes us blessed and a Savior on the cross is the proof. So brothers, sisters, repent. The kingdom of heaven, believe it or not, has come near. It's come right here.

Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, you have not offered us any easier life. In fact, it might feel like death to walk into the kingdom. But help us to remember when you said this is a kingdom of joy and of peace. It's a kingdom where we never have to be afraid that the king will turn on us because you are the same yesterday and today and forever. For anyone listening to my words, God, at home, here at The Core, who is not a Christian, I pray that you would persuade their hearts. I pray that you would tear down every barrier, strip them of their pride, and help them to humbly come to you and find everything that their hearts crave. And Father, for those of us who do follow you, who have for many years, give us a deep spirit of humility. Push out every ounce of our pride as we think about Jesus, where he lived back then, and where spiritually he lives today. We pray this boldly because we approach your throne somehow as your forgiven children. We ask this all in Jesus' name, Amen.