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## Jesus Speaks a Better Word.....Luke Eicher

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Luke and Amanda, why don't you guys come up? Luke is preaching this morning, and I was supposed to introduce them, but I actually want to do something I wouldn't normally do.

But these are my good friends, and our good friends, Luke and Amanda Eicher. They pastor a church in Sturgis, Michigan, a LifeLinks Church. We're part of a network of churches known as LifeLinks.

And they are like one of the most Eastern churches, kind of out in the middle of the nowhere. But they like us so much that they push in to LifeLinks, even though it's at cost to do so. And Angie and I have known them for quite a few years.

I think, I don't know if either one of us, I don't think we're lead pastors when we first met. And so we've sort of walked a similar journey of taking over healthy churches and trying not to screw it up and all that sort of good stuff.

And here we are 15 years later. And so Luke is going to share the Word with us. But I just want to share something with you guys.

Can I do that? Just feel like I just want to encourage you this morning. As we were in the pre-prayer, I had an image come to my mind, but I didn't know what it all was.

And so I didn't release it then, but I'm just going to release this word to you now. What I saw was this image of really fine China, like pristine, the kind that sits in the cabinet and is never used.

But I saw this China, like coming out of the cabinet and being used. And as it was used, it got chipped. Sometimes it was dropped on the floor, pieces broke off, chips broke off.

And it would go back in the cabinet, and then somebody comes over, and it's brought out again, and used again, and dropped again. And it doesn't look so shiny anymore. It doesn't look so pristine.

And some would even look at it and go, it doesn't even look very worthwhile, that China. What I felt like the Lord was saying to me is that the China represents you guys.

The time in your life when you said, Lord, we don't want to just be on the shelf. We don't want to just be hidden behind the doors. We want to be used.

Use us, Lord. And you said, God, whatever you want us to do, we'll do. Wherever you want us to go, we'll go.

Just use us. But you didn't know what you were asking. You didn't realize that when you said, God, use me, that some were going to abuse the China.

You didn't realize that people were going to handle the China as though it was cheap. But you didn't care who used the China. You just said, God, use us.

And so He has allowed you to be used and abused. And you keep saying, God, use me again. And more chips form, and it's cost you.

But I feel like the Lord would say to you this morning that every chip, every scar, every arm broken off, He honors you. He honors you because to Him, whatever you've done to the least of these, you've done to Him. And you've been faithful.

And you've said, Lord, I don't, I'm not the person I used to be. And God is saying to you, yeah, and it's precious to me. It's precious to me.

It's a sweet smell in my nostrils. And I feel like the Lord says to you, that even in the pain, even in the scars, even in the brokenness and the chipping, the Lord is bringing you a new kind of people. He's bringing you the broken.

He's bringing you the scarred. He's bringing you those that have been chewed up and spit out by life. He's bringing you those with broken hearts, like David in the cave of Adullam.

God is bringing you the broken, the disenfranchised. And the Lord says to you that out of the broken and in the disenfranchised, there's an army that's going to arise. The Lord is, there's a mighty army.

There's the mighty men and mighty women of God that are going to come out of the broken places. And God is actually going to use your own brokenness to attract brokenness. And your story of perseverance is going to be a story to others.

The lessons you've learned are going to be lessons that you're going to share. And God isn't going to waste your sorrows. And God isn't going to waste your scars.

And God isn't going to waste your tears. They've been poured out before him like a drink offering. Paul said, I've been poured out and you've been poured out.

But God says, these are days when I'm going to pour back into you. These are days, God says, when you're going to see my grace come upon you and upon your ministry in ways that you've never experienced it before.

God says, these are days when healing and restoration is going to come in new ways. And there's a new wave of the Holy Spirit. And there's a new wind of the Holy Spirit that is about to blow upon you and blow upon your congregation.

This far going to far surpass anything that you've ever seen. So stand firm, stand firm. Keep saying, God used me.

Keep allowing the door, the Lord to open the doors of the cabinets. And God says, you're going to be amazed. You're going to be amazed.

He honors you this morning. And I honor you today for your faithfulness. Blessing.

Luke, I'm taking your time. Give us the word.

Well, you're dismissed. Let me dry my tears. It's good to be here.

I think we've been here last in 2022. We came up to visit, and it's good to be back. My family's kind of growing up.

I got a picture of them here for the screen. There it is. We had our first daughter get married this summer.

She was my second born, 19 years old, got married. My oldest is also engaged, getting married next summer. And our family's growing up.

And so two years, and we're looking at an empty nest. And so life changes, and we're walking through those transitions. But it's been good.

God is good. Amen. Well, our words matter, right?

Do words matter? Absolutely. Proverbs says that the tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its flesh.

And many of us, we've experienced that, right? We've experienced words. We've experienced the death side of words, the hard words.

We've experienced shame, condemnation, manipulation, abuse, fear, despair, self-pity, hatred. The list could go on. We've experienced the power of the tongue in very dangerous and harmful ways.

But this morning, I want to declare to you that Jesus speaks a better word. Jesus speaks a better word over your life, over your circumstances, over your family, over your finances, over your health. Jesus speaks a better word.

He speaks a word of life. He speaks a word of blessing, a word of healing, a word of hope, a word of freedom. And this morning, I invite you to listen for the better word that Jesus would speak to you.

I know when I was young, I grew up in a family and we had a certain family culture and the words and the things from my family taught me that I had to earn my place of approval and my place of love in the family.

If I wanted to be accepted, I had to look a certain way. I had to act a certain way. I had to achieve a certain way.

And I projected that on God and that affected my relationship with the Lord and how I approached church and even how I approached ministry as a pastor.

And I had to walk through a season where I learned to hear a better word that God spoke over my life. And I remember one summer we had a sabbatical and it came at just the perfect time.

And I just sat on the porch every morning with my cup of coffee and I would meditate on the words of the Father spoken over Jesus when he was baptized. This is my beloved son whom I am well pleased. And I would just take those words in for myself.

And through a process that summer, that word transformed my life. I learned how to live out of a better word.

I learned how to live a transformed life where I didn't have to earn God's approval, but the things I did, I did because of God's love and approval. I did out of that. And it really changed my life.

And I just, I want to invite you this morning to listen for the better word that Jesus has for you. We're going to be in Matthew chapter eight. If you have your Bibles, I invite you to follow along.

We're going to basically go through the whole chapter. And we're going to look at five stories from Matthew chapter eight. And I invite you to not just listen to their stories, but to find yourself in the stories.

This isn't necessarily a teaching message this morning. It's an invitation. It's an invitation to find yourself and to hear the better word that Jesus has, to speak over your heart and over your life, because his word is powerful.

His word is active. His word is alive.

Isaiah says that as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is what?

My word, it's Jesus talking, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Amen?

Matthew 8, Jesus recognizes a man who has great faith. He says, this person has such great faith. I have not seen a single person in all of Israel with faith as great as this man.

And it wasn't a Jew. It was a Roman centurion. He understood the power of Jesus's word, and he trusted Jesus to speak a better word over his situation.

And the man said to Jesus, Jesus, just say the word. And my servant will be healed. Just say the word.

Just speak that word, and my servant will be healed. And this man was commended for having great faith. And his faith wasn't because he got God to do what he wanted to do.

His faith was because he believed that Jesus would do what he said he would do. And that is great faith. To believe that when Jesus speaks a word, it comes with the power and the will of God to bring it forth and to make it come to pass.

That is great faith. Will you believe the word of the Lord spoken to you today?

Trust Jesus to speak that better word over you today, over your identity, over your health, over your family, over your future, over your fears or your bad habits, your sin struggles, over your mind, your anxious thoughts, Jesus speak a better word.

So our first story is the leper. I'll read it and then we'll just see if we can find ourselves in the stories this morning. So a man with leprosy came and knelt before Jesus and said, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. Immediately, he was cleansed of his leprosy.

And Jesus said to him, see that you don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priest. Offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them. So the leper came to Jesus.

Lepers were outcasts in their society. They were unclean. They had to live outside of normal community.

In fact, if they came in anyone's presence, they had to announce unclean, unclean. There were even rules about how far they had to stay away from people. Six feet of upwind, 150 feet downwind.

Leprosy was a wasting disease that was described as a long, slow death. And when people saw a leper, they didn't see a person. They saw a disease.

They saw unclean. And this leper comes to Jesus, and he kneels before him. And he says, Jesus, if you're willing, you can make me clean.

And Jesus speaks that Better Word over him. I am willing. Be clean.

I am willing. Be clean. The world says stay away.

The world says you're this, you're that, you're less than, you're an outcast. Jesus says I'm willing. Be clean.

And I think for many of us, there are things that mark us. There are secrets that we have. There are things we've done that we're not proud of.

Sometimes we think to ourselves, if they really knew who I am or what I've done, we have this voice of shame that speaks to us. Sometimes we feel the shame of the outcast. Are you carrying shame?

Are you hiding secrets? Are you wasting away on the inside? When I was 15 years old, I found out that my dad had been carrying a secret my whole life that I never knew about.

And I didn't find out until I was 15 years old that my dad was a smoker. He smoked cigarettes, and he had kept that a secret. It was a source of shame in his life, just through his family situation, the church situation there where he grew up in.

And he carried this shame attached with smoking. And it was difficult to find out when I was 15, but my dad was a great guy. I don't want to say anything to take away from who he was.

He was a wonderful father. But I just remember how that affected me and realizing the power of secrets in our life and how important it is to deal with our secrets.

And I'd kind of forgotten about that as I grew up and I got married and I had children. But then about 12, 13 years ago, we sold our house and we actually lived with my dad again while we were building a new house.

And while we were living with my dad, I began to see some things and I remembered, oh, I forgot, I had forgotten basically that my dad was a smoker.

He was a farmer, he could go off and kind of hide and do it out in the field or the woods or in his truck. And I'd basically forgotten about it, but then all of a sudden, all the signs were there and I remembered, oh yeah.

And he was getting older in age and my wife, Amanda was taking him to hospital visits.

And I remember she came home from one visit and she said, I'm really struggling with this because they ask you when they're getting your health history, you know, do you smoke? Have you ever smoked?

And my dad kind of looked around and he said, no, I don't. And he couldn't get himself to say it, not in front of my wife anyway. And she was just so good and so loving and tender with him.

We decided she was going to just talk to him. And she just said, Ernie, we really love you. And we know that you have smoked and maybe you still smoke.

And we just want you to know that we don't think any less of you because of that. We know it's been a struggle for you most of your life. And we love you.

And when we go to the doctor visit, you know, you can be honest with them. It won't affect me. I don't care.

I still love you. And I remember two weeks before he passed away, I think, pretty close, he had gone to the doctor's visit and the doctor asked, you know, health history, whatever, and said, do you smoke? Have you ever smoked?

And my dad kind of looked at Amanda and smiled, and he said, yes, I do. But it was like this weight of shame had been removed from him. It was this powerful healing moment.

And I wish I could have been there even. And I think Amanda got to experience a reward that I wish I would have been able to be a part of. But Jesus comes to remove our shame.

He comes to cleanse us. And I think at a basic level, we all carry a need to be cleansed because of our sin and because of the disordered desires of our heart and because of intrusive thoughts and all these things.

We have a need to be cleansed by Jesus. And he says, I have a process for that and I invite you into it. And the process is not to ignore it or to hide it or to think that you are marked in a way that cannot be redeemed.

And my process is to come to me in humility. And if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You can be cleansed this morning.

Nobody needs to leave this morning feeling like a leper wasting away on the inside. Jesus speaks a better word over you today. He says, I am willing, be cleansed, just come to me like the leper, humble yourself and say, Jesus, make me clean.

He has a better word for you this morning. I am willing, be cleansed. And in fact, let's just take a moment right now.

We sing this song, I will make room for you. Let's make room for the voice of the Lord to speak to our hearts. Let's just go to the Lord at the posture of prayer.

Jesus, you know our hearts, you know where we are at, you know every individual in this room. Father, I ask that you just speak to us. Show us where you want to cleanse us, where you want to make us whole.

And Lord, I ask that you give us the courage to admit it, to confess it, to bring it to you, and to allow you to cleanse us today. In Jesus' name. Jesus speaks a Better Word.

The Roman centurion, continuing in Matthew, When Jesus entered Capernaum, a servant came to him, asking for help. Lord, he said, My servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly. Jesus said to him, Shall I come and heal him?

The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof, but just say the word. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one go, and he goes, and that one come, and he comes.

I say to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed, and said to those following him, Truly, I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then Jesus said to the Roman centurion, Go, let it be done just as you believed it would.

And his servant was healed at that very moment. The centurion was a powerful person. He was a man who carried authority.

He was used to getting his way. He had a hundred soldiers who answered to him. He would tell them, go here and do this, and they would respond, and they followed orders.

And he was a powerful man. And I appreciate that the Roman centurion, who finds himself in a desperate situation, doesn't come to Jesus making demands or trying to force his agenda on Jesus. But he comes with a request.

Jesus, I honor you. I recognize that you also are a powerful man and that your word is powerful. And all you have to do is say the word, and my servant will be healed.

And there's a humility that the Roman centurion comes to Jesus with, longing to see a breakthrough in a situation. I call it a humble desperation. And I think we need to come to Jesus with that same humility.

I know sometimes I come to Jesus with my agenda, with my wants, with my desires. Like Jesus, I need you to make this happen. I need you to do this.

And by the way, this over here is also really big and important. And if you could just take care of that, life would be good. But the centurion doesn't come telling Jesus what to say.

He just says, whatever you say is going to be the right thing. He trusts Jesus to do what is needed in the situation. He honors Jesus.

He says, I know that Jews don't normally come to the House of Gentiles. Just say the word. Your word is what I need right now.

And that's what we need. We need the word of the Lord. We need that better word.

Go. Let it be done just as you believed it would be. Because just one word from Jesus changes everything.

I could have thousands of eloquent words up here this morning, but you don't want my words today. You want the word of the Lord today. You want the voice of Jesus to speak into your life.

And I tell you, He's got a better word than I have. Too often we come to Jesus with our agenda, or we don't come to Jesus at all. But better than anything is to come and be near and be sheep who listen for His voice.

You know, there are problems that we can't fix. There is pain that we can't heal. There is struggle that we cannot overcome on our own.

And that's what this powerful Roman centurion ran into. And he realized, he said, I could look good and tough and put together on the outside. But he was willing to be vulnerable with Jesus and to admit that he had a need.

And so today I invite you not to look put together and tough on the outside, you don't have to hold up the church face with us. You don't have to have it all figured out. I invite you to be like the Roman centurion.

Just come to Jesus and bring your request and trust that his word and his voice is what you need in this time and season and situation of your life. Jesus, we invite you to speak a word over us today.

Jesus, we take off our masks, we lay down our pretenses, we want to stop pretending and be vulnerable and honest with you. And we trust that your word is what we need. Speak to us today.

Lord, we confess our weakness because we believe that where we are weak, you are strong. Next story, Peter's mother-in-law. This one doesn't get a lot of fanfare in the scriptures.

It says, when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. You know, mother-in-laws get a bad rap, don't they?

I did a quick little search and it was not hard to find websites with thousands of jokes dedicated towards mother-in-laws. I mean, honestly, my dog bit my mother-in-law the other day, and I had to take the dog to the vet.

And my friend asked me, I'm so sorry you had to have your dog put down. I said, no, I had to sharpen her teeth. That's just one of the jokes.

It didn't really happen. I love my mother-in-law. And to all the mother-in-laws, I'm sorry for the ways that you've been abused and mistreated and overlooked and unseen and maybe made to feel insignificant.

Because I think that happens often. Some of us, we've gotten a bad rap, maybe for good reason, but often without good reason. Many of us, we've poured out our hearts.

We've served those we've loved. We've given ourselves to our families and people around us only to feel unseen and underappreciated. I think that's kind of what the mother-in-law represents sometimes.

Do I really matter? Does anybody really care? Does anybody see me?

And Jesus walks into her room, and I'm sure if she was anything like my mother-in-law, she would have been saying, don't bother Jesus, and for goodness sake, don't let him see me like this.

Jesus walked into the room, and he didn't say a word, but he said everything. He touched her. And that touch said, I see you.

I see you. Some of you this morning need to know, he sees you. He cares about you.

You are important. You are significant. You are valuable.

You matter. He sees you. And she was healed in that very moment.

And her response to the healing touch of Jesus, and to being seen and valued and important, she had the strength to continue on serving and giving herself, as mother-in-laws selflessly do, right?

If you're feeling a little bit fatigued in your calling, and in your ministry, and in your family, you need to hear the word of the Lord this morning. You matter. You are valuable.

You are important. He sees you. To the weary mom who's chasing kids and changing diapers and exhausted all the time, he sees you.

To the hard-working husband who gives his strength at work all day long only to come home and be handed a child, or to be invited into the fray and who gives himself time and time again to his family, he sees you.

To the supportive grand parents who oftentimes maybe feel more like babysitters and taxi drivers than valuable human beings, he sees you. To those with long-term ailments, aches and pains, difficulties, he sees you.

To the hard-working employee whose promotion is long overdue, he sees you. To the young adult who's trying to find their place in this next season of life, he sees you.

And to the single adult who's longing to be married, but it just hasn't worked out, he sees you. To the widow, to the widower, to the alien, to the immigrant, to the undocumented, to the caretakers, to everybody else in between, he sees you.

Father, we bring ourselves to you, and we trust that you have a better word for us this morning. Lord, I invite you to speak that word of belonging and love and value over each person today. Thank you that you see us.

And to the disciples, the faithful, the ones who have been following Jesus, they've been pouring their lives into ministry, they're learning what it looks like to follow Jesus.

He's called them into the boat to cross the lake, and it says, He gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake, and then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat, but Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him saying, Lord save us, we're going to drown. He replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid?

Then he got up and rebuked the wind, the winds, and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, what kind of man is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.

So Jesus tells the disciples, hey, let's get in the boat, we're going to cross the lake. It's not a small lake, it's a big lake, 10 kilometers at least to go across it. They don't have motors, they've got oars.

They're working, they're following Jesus, they're trusting him, they're obeying his commands, they're being faithful. And out of nowhere, a serious storm comes up, treacherous, like they feared for their lives.

These are people who are used to being on the water. They knew what it was to handle a boat and to be in the lake, especially this lake, many of them. And they were afraid.

They said, Jesus, how can you be sleeping? We're going to drown, do something. I think this feels true to our lives sometimes.

We're faithfully following Jesus, obeying and doing everything we know to the best that we can.

We hear the Word of the Lord, and we do this, and He says, go do this, and we do that, and we're trusting Him, we're following Him, we're with Jesus, and all of a sudden, something happens. Life happens.

Crisis, emergency, something treacherous, dangerous, fearful. We feel out of control. We feel like we have no escape.

We're looking around, where's Jesus? How is He sleeping right now? Jesus, this is my life, this is serious business.

How are you sleeping? Have you ever felt that way? Like life just comes out of nowhere and hits you, and it feels like Jesus is sleeping.

I'm drowning. Why is this so hard? Jesus, do something.

Let me just say, Jesus was in the boat. They were in the right place. They were with Jesus in the boat.

Sometimes when circumstances feel out of control, it puts us into a panic. Don't panic. Continue to be faithful.

Follow Jesus. Trust Him. You know, sometimes we're like, am I in the right place?

Is this boat going anywhere? Is this boat sinking? Do I need to jump out of this boat?

And many people I know have jumped out of the boat, abandoning Jesus, abandoning their faith. And I tell you, that's the most dangerous place you can be when the storms of life come. Don't jump out of the boat.

They cried out, Jesus, save us, do something. He said, you have little faith. Why are you so afraid?

And for many years, I've taken that as a rebuke, like he's saying, like, guys, come on, have some faith here. But you know what? I've just recently come to read that as they still had some faith.

He was acknowledging they still had faith. It wasn't great faith, but they had a little faith. And let me just tell you, sometimes a little faith is all you need.

Sometimes a little faith is all you can muster. Sometimes a little faith is the only thing that you can get your hands around to keep yourself in the boat and to hang on to Jesus.

Especially when you're going through a dark night of the soul, or it just seems like everything is out of control. Sometimes we have to just hang on to Jesus with the little faith that we have.

And we can be encouraged because Peter was in that boat, James was in that boat, John was in that boat. These are some amazing disciples of Jesus. But in that moment, all they had was a little faith.

And so if you're here today and you feel like, man, I just have a little faith, if any, right now. I tell you what, if it's as big as a mustard seed, it's enough. Hang on to Jesus.

Don't abandon your faith. Trust him, because Jesus got up and he spoke a better word over their circumstances. Quiet.

Be still. And immediately it was calm. I tell you, you hang on to Jesus with the little faith that you do have, and you'll be like the disciples.

It says, they were amazed. You will be amazed when you least expect it. He'll speak that better word, and your circumstances will change.

He didn't speak the word over them. He spoke the word over their circumstances. And some of us this morning, we need Jesus to speak a better word over our circumstances.

Jesus, we look to you right now, and we ask, speak a better word over our circumstances. Some of us feel like we're drowning. Some of us feel like everything's out of control.

Some of us just feel like we don't even know what to do. We're battling doubt. Jesus speak a better word.

Lord stir up that little faith that still remains, and let us hang on to you with that white knuckle grip and never let go. Jesus name. As I get into my last point here, I'll invite the, I think we got a keyboard so it's gonna come on up.

The last story here is about the demon possessed men. Says when he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadareans, two demon possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way.

What do you want with us, son of God? They shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?

Some distance from them, a large herd of pigs was feeding. And the demons begged Jesus, if you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs. He said to them, go.

So they came out and went into the pigs and the whole herd rushed down the seat bank into the lake and died in the water.

Those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all of this, including what had happened to the demon possessed men. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave the region.

So there's some guys here that are pretty oppressed, outwardly oppressed. But maybe some of us are not outwardly oppressed, but we're inwardly oppressed. Doesn't matter.

A lot of commentaries I read kind of piqued my curiosity.

They talked about how intentional Matthew was with his stories here, and how Jesus came through the water that was chaotic and demonstrated that he is above all, that even the wind and waves obey him.

And then after that, we have these demons going into pigs and running down and drowning into the lake. And they talk about how the Jews would recognize as they are reading this, a parallel story from the Exodus.

How God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, which was a land of slavery and oppression. And he brought them through the waters by parting the waters. The wind and the water obeyed him.

And then as they came out on the other side, he drowned their enemies in the water.

And I can't help but think of these pigs floating in the water, representing the oppressors in our lives, and how Jesus has authority over the oppression in our lives.

And maybe you're not outwardly oppressed, like to the point where people would say they're demon-possessed, because I don't think there's room for Jesus and demons in us. Right? I mean, that's for people who are, they're getting into some bad stuff.

They're opening themselves up to witchcraft and the occult and things that should not be messed with. But sometimes, for some of us, oppression looks like things putting the squeeze on us in the bad way. It looks like addiction.

It looks like pornography. It looks like alcoholism or sexual immorality or greed or materialism.

It's these things in our life, they're squeezing us from all sides and they're pushing us away from trusting God, away from a life of fruitfulness, away from the joy in the life that Jesus has for us.

Jesus said, the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. But I have come that you may have life and have it abundant life to the full, rich, satisfying life. That's what he has for us.

That's what he's offering us this morning. You know, the thief is sneaky. He's different than a robber.

The robber comes and he pulls the weapon. And he says, Give me all your money. But the thief comes at night when you least expect.

You don't even know you're robbed until after it's happened. I think so often, we in the church are robbed blind by the enemy.

We don't realize we've given room for him to come and to oppress us and to steal from us and to kill, to bring death where there should be flourishing life.

And that word for destroy actually talks about it's not just like being broken, but it's about being unable to fulfill your purpose. And that gives us a good picture of oppression in our life.

It's the enemy drawing us away from our purpose as image bearers of God. It's him drawing us away into a life of either religious works or self-centered sin.

And he draws us away and he traps us and pressures us out of a fruitful life of fulfilling, living our call and walking out the things that God has for us. And he's sneaky.

It's fear, it's anxiety, worry, stress, busyness, hurry, anger, rage, control, manipulation, unforgiveness, passivity, withdrawal, avoidance, escapism, self-hatred, self-harm, or even the thought of harming others.

There are things in life where the enemy wants to use those to oppress us, to draw us away from our purpose in the Lord. But Jesus wants to speak a better word this morning. He wants to deal with the oppressor in your life.

Some of you feel very oppressed this morning. And you need to hear the chains break this morning as Jesus says go, as he deals with the oppressor in your life.

Some of you, maybe you just need to take a moment and reflect and say, am I being oppressed in my life?

And to be honest, and to reflect and say, are there things that are drawing me away from the purposes of God and from the life that Jesus has for me? And if there are, are you willing and open to hearing a Better Word from Jesus this morning?

Because the Better Word of Jesus says, I have come to set you free. He who the Son sets free is free indeed. Jesus speaks a Better Word.

So my time is up, I've tried to pray as we've gone through the message this morning.

But if you're here this morning, you feel a stirring in you, like I need to respond, I need to have some prayer ministry, I need somebody to stand with me, I want somebody to believe with me, for Jesus to speak a better word over my life, for him to

speak a word of life, a word of healing, a word of freedom, a word of breakthrough. If that's you this morning, as we close, I wanna invite you to come to the altar.

And I wanna invite the prayer team to come as well, and to minister, and while we do that, would you just stand to your feet, let's make it easy.

If you feel that stirring in your heart that you need to respond, just come on up as I pray, and we're gonna believe that Jesus will speak a better word over your life, over your circumstances, and that he will deal with the oppressor on your behalf.

Jesus, we thank you. You speak a better word. You have a better word for us than the lies that we've believed.

You have a better word than the shame that's been thrown at us and put on us, that we've put on ourselves. You have a better word than our masks and our facade and our pretending that we have it all figured out.

You have a better word for those who feel forgotten and unseen. Jesus, you have a better word for those of us who are questioning and in turmoil, and maybe we're battling doubt right now, or we're just in a crisis of faith.

And Jesus, you have a better word when it comes to the oppressor, trying to draw us away from the life and purpose that you have for us. Jesus, we invite you. Speak a better word over the congregation today.

Minister to us life, healing, purpose, freedom. Come, Holy Spirit. Breathe fresh upon us today.

Let the wind of heaven fill our sails. Just like we sang earlier, I'm desperate for you. Lord, may your word be that thing that we're desperate for today.

Because your word sustains us and gives us life. Jesus, speak a better word. In Jesus' name.