

God's Fellow Workers | Mark Proeger

SPEAKER	Mark Proeger
DATE	Sunday, January 21, 2024
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 3; Ephesians 2; Matthew 5; John 6; Judges 6; James 5; John 4
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:15:29 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

A lot of Christians treat salvation as the end of the transaction, and then spend years quietly starving without knowing why. Mark's argument is that the meal was included in the fare all along: God has prepared works for ordinary people to walk in, and he wants to do them *with* us. The hunger you feel is not a defect in your faith. It is the invitation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ “Are you hungry for God?” was the question Mark said he came to ask, and he asked it four times. Dissatisfaction with a merely saved life is not ingratitude — it is appetite.
- ◆ Works do not earn anything; they flow out of a love already given. James is not contradicting Paul, he is showing you the evidence.
- ◆ When the crowd asked Jesus what work God requires, he answered with one word: believe. Belief is itself the work, and it is the work that produces every other one.
- ◆ Elijah is described in scripture as a man with a nature exactly like ours. The Bible does not hold him up as unattainable; it holds him up as ordinary.
- ◆ God met Gideon hiding in a winepress and called him a mighty man of valor. He addresses people by what he intends to make of them, not by where he finds them.
- ◆ “Go in this might of yours.” God gives real gifts, real inclinations, real abilities, and then tells us to use them — not to pretend they are not there.
- ◆ Selling yourself short is not humility. Believing more in your inability than in God's ability is faith turned upside down.

- ◆ Jesus said his food was to do the will of the one who sent him. Feeding and working are the same act, not competing ones.

► 1:15:29

Mark opened by admitting he was carrying a sense of urgency into the morning, and that the service had already confirmed it before he stood up — the worship, and then person after person coming forward with the same message about running to God. He has followed Jesus for forty-five years, forty-one of them at Hope Chapel, in a seat he could still point to.

The family who ate in their room

► 1:18:03

The title comes from a single verse: “For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Then the story. A poor European family saves for years to buy passage to America, and every evening while the other passengers go down to the dining room, they stay in their cabin eating the meager rations they packed. The night before landfall the father dresses the family in their best and takes them to dinner, money in hand. The captain looks confused. Meals were included in the price of the ticket.

“A lot of Christians come to Christ, they experience salvation, and they think that's it,” Mark said. “They think that's the end, and it's just the beginning.” The rest of the message was an argument that there is far more included in what God did in Jesus than the rescue.

Faith, works, and which one comes first

► 1:21:09

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

EPHESIANS 2:8–10 ↗

Centuries of theologians have argued over faith and works, and Mark cut it short: Paul says salvation comes by faith, and James says he will show you his faith by his works — not to earn anything, but as the result of it. He described a Muslim friend in Africa, a devout man whose son had memorized much

of the Quran, who was horrified by the idea. In that framework you stand before God, your works are weighed, and you hope the good outweighs the bad — and even then several other things have to go right. Salvation stays uncertain. “That's not the faith that we were invited into in Christ.”

His test for the difference is ordinary love: if you know someone loves you, you do not serve them to earn it. The serving comes out of the love.

You are the light of the world

► 1:23:59

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:14–16 ↗

He had the room turn and say it to a neighbor, then named the discomfort: Jesus also says “I am the light of the world.” Both are true, and the second is why the first is. It is not meant to inflate anyone. It is meant to humble you — that he would say it at all. Mark had written the thought down at the memorial of a good man, Cotton H., after hearing his brother put the two verses side by side.

A quick tour of people who worked with God

► 1:28:44

Noah believed God and built a boat for years, and humanity survived. Abram was called out of Haran to a land he had not seen, and believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Daniel kept doing the right thing under one empire after another and ended up in the lions' den — and Mark noted, honestly, that we do not know whether those lions were docile or growling all night. We only know he came out unharmed.

Then the question the crowd put to Jesus, and the answer that reframes the whole argument:

“Then they said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’”

JOHN 6:28–29 ↗

That only sounds like a contradiction. “When you believe, you're willing to build a boat that takes you years and years to build in order to save humanity. When you believe, you're willing to leave your family and go to a land that the Lord is going to show you.” Belief is the work that walks. Which led to a question worth sitting with: what if our lives are measured by how many different ways we believed God?

► 1:31:13

Elijah calling down fire is one of the wildest acts of faith in scripture — one man against the prophets of a god the whole culture had accepted. And then:

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

JAMES 5:17–18 ↗

Scripture does not present him as an unreachable standard. It says he was like us.

Gideon in the winepress

► 1:33:11

Israel had been so thoroughly beaten down by Midian that they were living in caves and mountain dens, and their crops were stripped bare each harvest (Judges 6:1–6). When they finally cried out, God sent an unnamed prophet — Mark pointed out he had never noticed the omission before — who did nothing but rehearse their history back to them: *I brought you up from Egypt, I delivered you, I gave you their land, and you have not obeyed my voice* (Judges 6:7–10). The emphasis falls entirely on what God did.

► 1:36:34

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.’”

JUDGES 6:12 ↗

Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress, hiding from raiders. Mark noted that most theologians read “the angel of the Lord” here as a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ — and if so, there is no one in the universe who could say that sentence with more authority. Gideon's reply was not exactly faith: if

the Lord is with us, why has all this happened, and where are the wonders our fathers told us about (Judges 6:13)? He believed what God had done. He did not believe God would do it now.

“I believe you can, but will you?”

► 1:37:57

Here Mark moved his own story forward from the end of the message, because it was Gideon's line. He and Cessie were praying about something good and well outside their budget. One morning he sensed the question: *do you believe I can provide that money?* His answer was Gideon's — yes, I believe you can, but will you? Do I matter enough?

He grew up without a father, and his mother taught the children a promise she repeated for years: God is a husband to the husbandless and a father to the fatherless. Early on she told people about their needs; then she became convinced she should stop asking and simply trust God, and instead let her children in on what happened. An electric bill of about sixty-three dollars was days from cutting the power off — no credit card, no fallback — and a cashier's check for sixty-five arrived in the mail from someone who never identified themselves. “That might be the best thing my mom did as a mother,” he said. She also made a point of telling people afterward who had provided.

So the week he asked his question, the answers came in a run: a guest at the RV park he runs paid him eighty dollars to walk a dog; a man he had consulted for years earlier called about land in Brenham and paid three hundred seventy-five for a look; someone he drives to Dallas for medical care handed him two hundred for sixty-five dollars of gas. It has not stopped since November, he keeps a spreadsheet, and it cannot be explained as budget slack because the budget is spoken for. He also said plainly, twice, that nothing given to him by anyone in the room would be counted toward it.

“Go in this might of yours”

► 1:44:49

“And the LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?’ And he said to him, ‘Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘But I will be with you.’”

JUDGES 6:14–16 ↗

What jumped out at Mark was that God did not correct the phrase. He said *this might of yours* — not because the might originates anywhere but God, but because God has genuinely given Gideon something, and gives us gifts, inclinations and abilities we do not have to pretend away. He cited Bill Johnson's correction of a prayer he had prayed himself: “Lord, none of me and all of you.” It sounds humble. But why not all of you working through all of me? “We set up these weird false binaries that are just silly.”

When God commissioned Gideon, Gideon turned back to his doubts about himself — who am I, my clan is the weakest. Mark could match him: son of a single mother, poor family. “That doesn't interest God.” And selling yourself short is not modesty; it is trusting the lies you tell yourself over what God says about you.

► 1:48:39

Which cashes out on Monday. You can go to work tomorrow and, maybe for the first time in years, do that work to the glory of God rather than filing Sunday and work in separate drawers. And you are free to pursue the dreams God has actually put in you. When Mark and his family moved to Africa, someone asked whether he just wanted an adventure. He wrestled with it and concluded: yes — and that is how God made him. Doing the thing you enjoy, by his power and for him, is allowed.

He also warned this is not a call to manufacture something heroic. It is the works “which God prepared beforehand.” Some dreams may need laying down; some abilities need growing into; we are all works in progress. And the one we follow into it is not a hired hand — “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11–15). The one who died for you is the one who empowers what he has laid on your heart.

Gideon does go on to strike Midian — with an army God deliberately whittled down to three hundred, so that the glory would be unmistakable, and so those men would spend the rest of their lives saying *I was one of the three hundred*.

The food you don't know about

► 1:52:33

“Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’... Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.’”

JOHN 4:31–34 ↗

Mark's picture of what this feels like was small on purpose. At nineteen, rollerblading home from UT with no money and no financial aid left, a contact lens blew out of his eye. He was annoyed at God about it. Then, getting replacements, he fell into a long conversation with the doctor about Jesus and walked out thinking he would gladly have paid a couple hundred dollars for that conversation. “Those curveballs that seem unfair — maybe God's got something just right around the corner.”

His closing instruction was as plain as it gets: someone far more important than you wants to meet with you tomorrow, so schedule the time. Then an old-fashioned altar call, done from the seats — hands raised by everyone who wanted to walk this out at a deeper level, himself included — and prayer teams at the front afterward.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 Corinthians 3:9
- Ephesians 2:8–10
- James 2:18
- Matthew 5:14–16
- John 8:12
- Romans 4:3
- John 6:28–29
- James 5:17–18
- Judges 6:1–6
- Judges 6:7–10
- Judges 6:12
- Judges 6:13
- Judges 6:14–16
- John 10:11–15
- John 4:31–34

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Mark asked it four times, so it is worth answering out loud: are you hungry for more of God right now, or have you settled into eating in your room?
2. Where have you assumed that salvation was the whole of what God had for you, and what has that assumption cost you?
3. Gideon believed what God had done but not that God would do it now. Where is that the shape of your faith?
4. “Go in this might of yours.” What has God actually given you — an ability, an inclination, something you enjoy — that you have been treating as too ordinary to count?
5. Mark said someone far more important than you wants to meet with you tomorrow. What time is it, and what would you like to bring to it this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Mark Proeger has followed Jesus for forty-five years and has been part of Hope Chapel for about forty-one of them, from the seats near the front where his family sat around 1980 and where his wife came to faith. He grew up without a father, raised by a mother who taught her children to trust God for provision. He has lived and served in Africa, runs an RV park, and consults on RV park development.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4DLNpPxYYM&t=4529s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.