

Well, good morning, everyone. Felt like we should have just watched the movie. How many of you guys have seen this movie? Maybe you guys love this movie. Okay, 1245.

That's about right. I'm divided on this movie. I had not even seen it. I knew it was on the list of things. We're in a series called at the movies.

We do this every couple years at Sherwood Oaks. We go through some classic Christmas movies and bring them sort of as a jumping off point for some messages and some just themes that we feel are beneficial and helpful. Remind us of the reason for the season, to not coin a phrase. But I'd not seen this movie and what little I had seen of it. Like, just even stills, I'm like, I don't think I would like that movie.

I'll be honest with you. I'm still not sure I like the movie. It's just sort of creepy at some points. Anyone agree with me that this movie feels a little creepy sometimes? Okay.

I'm not the only one. We got a few back there. But if you are unfamiliar with the movie, it's the story of a young boy. We saw him there, who's moving from the innocence of childhood into the harsh reality of adulthood. And one of the first things he loses is just sort of his belief in the magic of this season.

In the story, we follow this kid. We don't ever have his name. He's just called sort of hero boy in the credits. But he's very skeptical of the magic of Santa Claus and Christmas. And he's set on giving up his childish beliefs.

He believes and disproving that Santa exists. That is, until he jumps on board the Polar express one night and he experiences the journey of a lifetime. And on that train ride, he made new friends. He meets a friendly hobo. Is that what that guy is?

Ghost hobo thing? Elves, the North Pole. He has lots of hot chocolate, which is very important when you're on an adventure. And throughout the journey, the nagging question that the little boy keeps being presented with is, do you have to truly see something to believe in something? In fact, the conductor actually says that at one point.

To the skeptical little boy, he says, seeing is believing. But sometimes the most real things in the world are things that we cannot see. Now, as adults, we learn this. We know this and we discover this. But as kids, especially at that stage where seeing is believing, that may be a harder lesson to learn.

It reminds me of what Jesus said to Thomas. You remember this? In John 2029? He says, Jesus says this because you have seen me, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe.

We can feel like sometimes it's very childish to believe in something that can't be seen or tasted or felt, because children tend to believe things more easily. We think as adults that if we do the

same thing, then we're just being childish. And so we trade in our belief and our faith and our trust into something and trade it in for something more cynical, more adultish. And if that's where you're at this morning, can I just encourage you just to hold on just a sec, before you go all the way, and let's just listen to what Jesus says about how to approach his kingdom. He says this in mark ten.

They were bringing children to him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant, and he said, let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. For to such pay attention to this, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it.

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, will not enter it. He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. I love that phrase. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child doesn't say it'll be harder to enter. It says they will not enter the kingdom of God.

It is imperative. Childlikeness is the key to experiencing the reality of God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Now, what does that mean? Well, when it comes to receiving the kingdom of God, we must do it with the natural humility of children. We're going to explore that in just a little bit, but let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this morning. We thank you for the opportunity to celebrate your birth. We thank you that we're looking forward now to the new themes that you're going to do. The new year is just around the corner, and with it, just the anticipation of things that we do not yet know about, things that we might be afraid of, things that might intimidate us, things that might make us cynical. But we pray that we enter into this new time, a new season with you.

And we pray that as we move into this new place, you will help us re retain and restore the childlike wonder, the childlike faith that allows us to experience fully and truly the kingdom that you intended for us to live in here on earth. Help us to do that in Jesus name. Amen. So when Jesus tells us to be childlike, he doesn't mean what we oftentimes think of child. If you've got children, you know that they can be very childish.

But that's not what he's saying at all. He's saying we need to be like children in certain respects. Now, I've heard a thousand sermons on this, so I could regurgitate some of those, but I'm not going to. I want to talk about two things that I. Well, about three things that I think are very childlike.

And I want us to at least encourage this in our own life. Here's the first thing. Children are not afraid to test their faith. Mason has a phone case that he says promises that he can drop it from like 25, 50ft and it won't break. He has absolute faith in that phone case and he has tested that a couple of times.

And you know what? So far, the phone case is holding up to that claim. Our little hero wasn't afraid to test his faith. Even though he was struggling with it, he didn't step back from it. He stepped into it with a little bit of encouragement from the conductor.

If you know the story, you know that when he was at his most cynical moment, the train arrived and he had an opportunity to step into it. And at first, what does he do? He says, no, I'm not going to do it. But then he's like, what have I got to lose? Let's go.

When it comes to our faith, we often struggle. That's sort of what faith is about, honestly. But then we never take the step to resolve the struggle. We just go, it doesn't seem right. So I'm not even going to bother anymore.

Instead of experiencing, experimenting with our faith and testing it out, instead of throwing it to see if it survives a 50 foot drop, we just simply say, no, I don't think so. Instead of continuing in our adventure of faith, being a disciple, we step out and we become a deserter. Have you ever done that? I have. Here's the truth.

Faith does require something from us. The writer of James says that faith without works is dead or dying. It does require something from us. It requires our engagement at some level. And some of us are so nervous about engaging and testing our faith because once upon a time we learned that we should not test God, that we're afraid to test our faith.

God says, try me, try me and see if I won't do what I promised to do. We're so nervous about our faith that we don't actually do anything with it. But in one sense, if we don't throw it and see what happens, we will never see God at work. When our faith is struggling, when we have lots of questions. The thing we shouldn't do is to step back.

What we should do is step forward and onto a train, get on board like Moses stepping into the Red Sea, or David picking up some stones there on the battlefield with Goliath in front of him, or Peter getting out of the boat in the middle of the storm. All of them facing their doubts, realizing them, and getting on the train anyway, saying, let's do it. Let's see what will happen. That's childlike faith. Children aren't afraid to test their faith, and children find it easy to receive.

When you're traveling in Germany with me someday, and I would love for all of you to do it. One of the biggest concerns and fears of mine when traveling in a foreign country is getting on a train and going, where did I put my ticket? Because if the conductor comes around and you do not have your ticket on you, you can be fined on the spot. Pam, what's the fine that you can be fined €100. That's not a small little chunk of chunk of change.

So you want to have your ticket with you if you know the story. The little boy gets on the train without a ticket. He gets on the train, he sits down. The conductor comes around to check his ticket, and he doesn't have one. Who?

That's a little scary. I felt panicky for him in that moment. The conductor, however, says, check your pocket. When he pulls it out, there is the train ticket. And he simply hands it to the conductor, and the conductor punches it.

No stress, no worries. A child doesn't stress about trying to pay his way onto the train. He doesn't worry about trying to earn grace or favor. Only adults put pressure on children to sort of earn their way. Kids, if you're in the room right now, close your ears because I want to say something that I don't know, your parents may not want.

Look at those boys back there doing it. Look at that. Listen, you've got blessed children back there. I see some of you kids do not. You do, too.

Here's what I'm going to say. Only adults put pressure on children to earn their way. Have you noticed that? Do your chores and you'll get your allowance. Clean your room and you can go hang out with your friends.

Earning our way. You can take your hands down, kids. Now you can listen. Earning our way is a very adult thing to do, isn't it? We want to make sure that we put in our part, that we do our part.

No one's going to cover my expenses. I'm going to do it. I'm off point right now, Bo. A couple of weeks ago, I got a call from first Baptist. Jason, who's the pastor over there, said, hey, Tim, I know you got some kids in the house now.

We're doing care baskets. Do you need a care basket? Now? I'm telling you, two months ago, I'd say that. Care basket?

Nah, I'm good with two teenagers in the, I'm like, yeah, yeah. What time you gonna be by? I'll make sure I'm home to pick it. Learning. I'm learning to receive.

Jesus reminds us the kingdom really is about receiving, not earning.

Receiving takes some humility. Remember the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and says, what must I do to earn eternal life? What do I got to do to make sure that God allows me in? Jesus says that, keep the commands. He goes, well, I've done that since I was a little kid.

I've been earning my way for a long time. Jesus is like, well, go sell everything and go back to trusting in God rather than your riches. And the rich young ruler is like, yikes. How am I going to earn the things to get what I need? The things I need to get?

How am I going to do that without anything? Scripture says, disheartened, he went away sorrowful. He thought the kingdom could be earned. The kingdom is not earned. The kingdom is received, and children know how to receive.

The third thing is childlike faith simply embraces the journey. Oh, my word. If you've not seen the movie, I will encourage you just to watch the first half of it where they're on the train ride. It is the craziest. I was the whole time going, who would allow their child to get on this train and ride?

It is crazy. And the weirdest thing was how naturally these kids took to the adventure I was as an adult. I'm like, no, not on my watch. Nothing made sense. The train was off the tracks.

The majority of the time, kids were on top of the trains, running across the cars in twelve inches of snow. Wind was blowing, there was a weird hobo guy sitting up on the top. Some of you know what I'm talking about. Some of you are looking at me like, what exactly? Where was the conductor?

Who was the conductor? Who was the hobo? Where are the adults in the room? They're in there making hot chocolate. No, we need some supervision here.

As adults, those kind of journeys make us very nervous. But as kids, it's just a wild and crazy and fun ride. A person with childlike faith sees no problem with a crazy journey. After all, someone is in charge. It's not us.

Someone's in charge. We're just going to enjoy it. We may not be able to see the person in charge, but we have every confidence he's there and he'll get us where we need to get to. That's the kind of faith that Jesus has enabled us to receive. The kingdom of God.

Two Corinthians five tells us that we walk by faith, not by sight. The conductor say some things, some very important things can't be seen. So if you're in a place where your faith looks more like a cynical adult and less like a child, then how do you get back to that place? Some of the things that I think are important to know is that you need to be able to hear God's voice. Some of us have gotten the point where we're afraid to listen because we might hear God speak.

But don't be afraid. Simply ask to hear from God. Romans 10:17. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And so we listen for God's voice.

And then how do we recognize it when we hear it? Well, I believe a time tested way is this. We spend time with Jesus in the gospels. We start there, listen to how Jesus talks, listen to what his values are, watch and observe him in action, learn what he values and cares about. And then as you're reading, pray for ears to hear the voice of Jesus and his instruction to you.

What promptings come to you as you read and listen? Is it something you need to do? Something you need to stop doing? Someone you need to pray for, somewhere you can be a help and a blessing. But hearing what God is speaking to us is rarely as loud as a train whistle outside our bedroom window.

But if we pray for ears to hear, God will give us ears to hear his voice. We need to listen and be ready to hear. The second thing is this. This is one for me personally, because I feel there's times I hear God's voice, but then give myself an hour and a half and I can convince myself that what I heard was really just my guilty conscience or what I heard was just my overactive sense of charity and kindness. Like, okay, Lord, I don't really need to do that.

I don't really think that was you saying that. Anyone else there with me on that I can talk myself out of God's word to me too easily. See, it's not just hearing God's voice, but it's acknowledging it and recognizing, okay, that is the voice of God. In my life.

If we prayed to hear from God, then God, I believe, honors that prayer every time. So if you hear the voice of God, I'm going to encourage you to do a couple of things. And if you in the moment think, I feel like that's God, write it down. Put it literally, get a piece of paper and pen and write down what God told you to do, and then do something else. Call someone that you trust and say, God told me this.

Now, this sounds. I know for those of you who weren't raised Pentecostal, this sounds like completely out of the box stuff. But God speaks to Methodist and Baptists, too. Amen. He absolutely does.

And if God's giving you some instruction for your life, and I believe he does, he leads and guides us, then he will speak to you. When he does, don't dismiss it. Write it down. Call a trusted friend, someone that, you know, walks with the Lord, and say, hey, here's what I feel like God is saying. What do you think?

And then the third thing is this, you act on it. You get on the train, you get on board. Don't step back, step forward. Faith comes by hearing, but hearing comes by the word of God. And faith grows by our obedience.

That's the big one for me. Obedience.

That obedience is given confidence. Remember the little girl, confident leader, the spirit of Christmas? That confidence comes from listening and hearing and obeying the voice of the one who has ultimate authority. In Isaiah, God describes himself this way. He goes, my purposes will stand, and I will do all that I please.

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. That's some authority right there. That is ultimate authority. And with that kind of authority behind his voice, then I can act with absolute confidence that God is going to do what God said he was going to do. So, like Moses, I can step into the red sea with the armies of pharaoh behind me and an uncertain future ahead of me.

I can walk into the muddy earth of the base of the sea with confidence. If that's my confidence, then I can walk out onto the battlefield with a giant in front of me and look around and see five little stones and go, okay, God is with me. If that's my confidence, then when Jesus says, well,

get out of the boat. I can get out of the boat and walk across the stormy water. It's one thing to say you believe and another thing to altogether to get on board.

What the conductors say, seeing is believing. But sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we cannot see. And when we take that first step of faith, that next step of faith, for some of us, the God who purposes and plans will pull the pieces together for us. This promise from Romans is a good one for those of us who are taking risky steps of faith right now. Says anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.

God is not going to embarrass you.

Hebrews reminds us without faith, it's impossible to please him. For he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he's a rewarder of those who seek him. If you want to experience God, if you want to restore your faith, your childlike faith in God, then you must believe that he is. And you must believe that he responds to those who put their trust and faith in him and act accordingly. In other words, get on board.

If you're here this morning and you're sort of struggling at this point in your faith, we're like, I don't know. I'm here because someone expects me to be here, but I'm not really sure I believe in all of this. Can I just encourage you to step forward into faith, not step back from faith. Step into what God's calling you to and see what happens next. Embrace the journey.

There may not be hot chocolate involved. I can't promise that. But God rewards those who seek him. I know that for sure. Today we're going to share in a time of communion and the bread and the juice.

These elements remind us of the obedience of Jesus, and I want it to remind us of the opportunity we have as well. To be obedient. Wherever God has you this morning in your faith, this bread and cup can be a signifier of your willingness to go on in this journey and in this adventure. Jesus said this to his disciples, whoever wants to be my disciple, a disciple, not a deserter. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

I don't know what your next step of obedience, but as you take the bread and the cup today, I would pray that this would be an opportunity. If you say, Lord, as I take the elements, I am also saying yes to being obedient to the next step of faith that you're calling me to. In so doing, my faith will become more childlike and mature. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the way that you lead us and instruct us.

We're thankful for the way that you give us confidence to move forward in our faith, to step into uncertain places and see what you will do. Lord, I am so thankful that I don't have to earn my way onto the train, but I simply come because of your grace and your warm welcome and you provide what I need. Lord, I'm thankful that in this crazy adventure that you call life, you are conducting and leading and taking this train exactly where we need it to be, where you want us

to be. So, Lord, I pray for anyone here this morning who's sort of wrestling with what that looks like in their lives, and I pray that you would encourage them by your spirit to move into the next step of obedience to get on board to see where you take them. I pray this in Jesus name.

Amen.