

ADRIAN ROGERS

LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



P S A L M S

These transcripts are taken straight from live audio recordings of Adrian Rogers during his tenure as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. As such some of the transcripts may contain stutters, stammers, transcription errors, and other authentic remarks as would be common in a live setting.

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Psalms

1. **God's Blueprint for a Blessing** | Psalms 1
2. **The Ultimate Triumph** | Psalms 2
3. **Will There Be Peace on Earth?** | Psalms 2:7
4. **How to Be a Dynamite Dad** | *Psalms 3:3*
5. **What Is Man?** | *Psalms 8:1-9*
6. **How Long, Lord?** | *Psalms 13*
7. **Can an Intellectual Believe in God?** | *Psalms 19*
8. **Three Ways God Speaks to Us** | *Psalms 19*
9. **How You Can Know God Personally** | *Psalms 19*
10. **Three Ways You Can Know God** | *Psalms 19:1-14*
11. **It's All About Jesus** | *Psalms 22*
12. **The Prophecy of Jesus** | *Psalms 22*
13. **An Old Testament Calvary** | *Psalms 22:1-31*
14. **The Best Is Yet to Be** | *Psalms 23*
15. **The Secret of Satisfaction** | *Psalms 23:1*
16. **How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Life** | *Psalms 23:1-6*
17. **How to Handle Stress** | *Psalms 23:2*
18. **How to Get Right with God and Stay Right with God** | *Psalms 23:3*
19. **How High Are Your Valleys?** | *Psalms 23:4*
20. **How to Smile at Death** | *Psalms 23:4*
21. **Making a Friend with Death** | *Psalms 23:4*
22. **How to Feel Good About God** | *Psalms 23:5*

(Click on any sermon title to go directly to that sermon.)

23. Finding the Will of God | *Psalms 32:8*
24. Knowing God's Will | *Psalms 32:8-9*
25. Principles to Discover the Will of God | *Psalms 32:8-9*
26. The Power of Perpetual Praise | *Psalms 34:1-17*
27. How to Win in the War with Worry | *Psalms 37:1-7*
28. Too Blessed to Be Stressed | *Psalms 37:1-7*
29. Grace: Greater Than Our Guilt | *Psalms 38*
30. How to Say Goodbye to Guilt | *Psalms 38*
31. How to Say Goodbye to Guilt | *Psalms 38*
32. The Singing Heart | *Psalms 40:1-3*
33. How to Deal with Depression | *Psalms 42*
34. How to Get Up When You're Down | *Psalms 42:5-11*
35. How to Get Up When You're Down | *Psalms 42:5-11*
36. How to Come Back When You're Down | *Psalms 51*
37. The Power of Perpetual Praise | *Psalms 57:7*
38. It Pays to Serve Jesus | *Psalms 73*
39. Only a Fool Envy a Fool | *Psalms 73*
40. When Life Doesn't Seem Fair | *Psalms 73*
41. The Generation to Come | *Psalms 78*
42. The Generation to Come and the America of Tomorrow | *Psalms 78*
43. How to Keep the American Dream Alive | *Psalms 78:1-6*
44. Will God Impeach America? | *Psalms 80*
45. A Miracle for America | *Psalms 80:1-3*
46. God Bless America | *Psalms 80:1-19*
47. A Miracle for America | *Psalms 85*
48. The America of Tomorrow | *Psalms 85:1-4*
49. A Miracle for America | *Psalms 85: 1-6*
50. A Miracle for America | *Psalms 85: 4-6*
51. The Prayer of a Patriot | *Psalms 85:4-6*
52. Freedom from Fear | *Psalms 91:5*

(Click on any sermon title to go directly to that sermon.)

53. Pardon with Punishment | *Psalms 99:8*
54. The Big Lie | *Psalms 100*
55. Dealing with Loneliness | *Psalms 102:6–7*
56. How to Win in the War with Loneliness | *Psalms 102:7*
57. Israel and Bible Prophecy | *Psalms 102:13–16*
58. How to Turn Thanksgiving into Thanksliving | *Psalms 107:21–22*
59. Sacrifices of Thanksgiving | *Psalms 107:22*
60. How to Live Twenty-Four Hours a Day | *Psalms 118:24*
61. Five Ways to Better Understand the Bible | *Psalms 119*
62. How to Make Your Bible Come Alive | *Psalms 119*
63. The Bible: The Book of the Ages | *Psalms 119*
64. How to Control Your Thought Life | *Psalms 119:9*
65. Guard Your Heart | *Psalms 119:9–16*
66. How to Have a Clean Thought Life | *Psalms 119:9–16*
67. Keeping Your Thought Life Clean | *Psalms 119:9–16*
68. The Path to Personal Purity | *Psalms 119:9–16*
69. The Seven Wonders of the Word of God | *Psalms 119:18, 27, 129*
70. How to Have a Meaningful Quiet Time | *Psalms 119:97–104*
71. The Soul Winners Heart | *Psalms 126*
72. Faithful in Evangelism | *Psalms 126:5–6*
73. Learning to Share Jesus | *Psalms 126:5–6*
74. Learning to Share Jesus | *Psalms 126:5–6*
75. Dads Who Shoot Straight | *Psalms 127*
76. Dads Who Shoot Straight | *Psalms 127*
77. Protect Your Home | *Psalms 127*
78. Cultivating Contentment in the Home | *Psalms 128*
79. Faith of Our Fathers | *Psalms 128*
80. Family Fun | *Psalms 128*
81. Father: Leader of the Band | *Psalms 128*
82. God’s Plan for the Man | *Psalms 128*

- 83. **The Godly Father** | *Psalms 128*
- 84. **Unity** | *Psalms 133*
- 85. **Unity in the Church** | *Psalms 133*
- 86. **Believers in Babylon** | *Psalms 137:1–4*
- 87. **Christians in Captivity** | *Psalms 137:1–4*
- 88. **Don't Lose Your Song** | *Psalms 137:1–4*
- 89. **The Sad Case of the Stolen Song** | *Psalms 137:1–4*
- 90. **The Sad Case of the Stolen Song** | *Psalms 137:1–4*
- 91. **Proof Positive That Elvis Is Alive
and That O.J. Will Get a Fair Trial** | *Psalms 139*
- 92. **The Glory of God's Presence** | *Psalms 139*
- 93. **Why Do I Exist?** | *Psalms 139*
- 94. **Why Do I Exist?** | *Psalms 139*
- 95. **Let Praise Change Your Life** | *Psalms 147*
- 96. **The Power of Praise** | *Psalms 147*
- 97. **It's Amazing What Praising Can Do** | *Psalms 147:1–13*
- 98. **The Power of Praise** | *Psalms 147:1–14*

(Click on any sermon title to go directly to that sermon.)

God's Blueprint for Blessing

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 28, 1981

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 1

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

PSALMS 1:1–2

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Companions That He Shuns
 - A. Avoid Sensual Wisdom
 - B. Avoid Sinful Ways
 - C. Avoid Scornful Words
- II. The Communion That He Seeks
 - A. He Appreciates the Word of God
 - B. He Assimilates the Word of God
 - C. He Appropriates the Word of God
- III. The Character That He Shows
 - A. He Will Show Vitality
 - B. He Will Show Stability
 - C. He Will Show Fertility
 - D. He Will Show Consistency
 - E. He Will Show Prosperity

Conclusion

Introduction

I want to speak to you tonight about "God's Blueprint for Blessing." Now, you can apply this to a blueprint for blessing in the ministry, but actually, it's just a blueprint for blessing whomever you may be, wherever you may serve, and whatever you may do. Let's find the heart of the Bible, the book of Psalms, and find the keynote psalm, Psalm 1. Most of us have learned this psalm as children, committed it to memory. It's a blessed psalm, a wonderful psalm. It's really an explanation of all of the psalms. And, it starts out with the word *blessed*. That's the reason I'm entitling the message tonight "A Blueprint for Blessing." Now, in this psalm, as you're going to see, it talks about a righteous man being a tree, so I started to call this sermon "How to be a 'Tree-mendous' Christian." And so, whether you want to be a blessed preacher or a "tree-mendous"

Christian, I want you to listen and pay attention.

Now, here's what God says, and He's saying it not just to this young preacher; He's saying it to all of us: *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous...the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."*(Psalms 1:1–6)

Now there are three things that come to me about the blessed man, the man of God, the man that God wants to bless, that "tree-mendous" Christian. Three things come to me as I look at these verses tonight. Of course, there are many other things here, but these three things I want us to see about the man of God. First of all, I want us to see the companions that he shuns—the companions that he shuns. And then, I want us to see together something of the communion that he seeks. And thirdly, I want us to show, or see, the character that he shows.

I. The Companions That He Shuns

Now, look at the companions that he shuns in verse 1: *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."*(Psalms 1:1) And here, God is making a division between the righteous and the unrighteous. And, God always divides men; He always separates between men, but He doesn't do it as we do it. We separate men according to the rich and the poor, according to the strong and the weak, the cultured and the uncultured, but God doesn't divide them this way. God separates them as saved and lost, saint and sinner, or as someone would say, "the saints and the ain'ts." We have a way of separating men on sort of a horizontal level. We say there's upper class, middle class, and lower class. But, God doesn't seem to separate men on a horizontal level; God separates men on a vertical level: some on His right hand, some on His left hand. On the one side are the sheep, and on the other side are the goats. Again, on one side are the saints, and on the other side are the sinners. And so, God doesn't divide men as we do. God doesn't see as man sees. *"Man [looks] on the outward appearance, but [God looks] on the heart."*(1 Samuel 16:7) We have a way of classifying men according to the bluebook of society, or the bankbook of finance, or even the church-book of religion, but God divides men according to His book, the Holy Word of God.

And so, here we see a contrast in verse 1 between the child of God and the child of

the devil. Here you see the man of God. The blessed man of God is seen from a negative viewpoint: *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”*(Psalms 1:1) And, there are three things I want you to see that you are to avoid in all of your ministry, and I’m to avoid in my ministry, and every deacon is to avoid, and every Sunday School teacher is to avoid, and every child of God is to avoid.

A. **Avoid Sensual Wisdom**

Number one: We are to avoid sensual wisdom—we are to avoid sensual wisdom. Here’s a *“man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.”*(Psalms 1:1) That is, he’s not to get his wisdom, his counsel, his philosophy from this world. Ungodly philosophies will poison your mind. George, I’m glad that you had the opportunity to study in a seminary where the professors believe in the validity, and fallibility, and inerrancy of the Word of God. I believe the devil has started to give to young preachers ungodly counsel through liberal schools and liberal seminaries. Here’s a *“man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.”*(Psalms 1:1) We’d better learn to get our counsel from heaven. It may come through men, but it must begin in heaven.

B. **Avoid Sinful Ways**

And so, not only is the blessed man going to avoid sensual wisdom, but he’s also going to avoid their sinful ways. Now, look at it again: *“[he] walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners.”*(Psalms 1:1) It’s very interesting for me to note here that, first of all, God shows a man in the counsel of the ungodly, and in the next step, he’s standing in the way of sinners, because ungodly counsel always leads to sinful living. And, *the devil, therefore, had rather get you to think a wrong thing than to do a wrong thing, because the thought is the father of the deed.* And, if the devil can get you to taking ungodly counsel, he’s not going to have much difficulty getting you to live in sinful ways, because *“as [a man] thinketh...so is he.”*(Proverbs 23:7) The thought is the father of the deed.

C. **Avoid Scornful Words**

But now, watch it—first of all, there’s the devil’s sensual wisdom that leads to the devil’s sinful ways that leads to the devil’s scornful words. Notice the last part: *“nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”*(Psalms 1:1) The chief seat in Satan’s kingdom is the seat of the scornful. Now, when He’s talking about the seat of the scornful, He’s talking about the man who is proud of his sin—he’s proud of his wickedness.

The man of God—he’s going to be known by the companions that he shuns. He’s not going to seek their sensual wisdom. He’s not going to walk in their sinful ways. He’s not going to speak their scornful words. The last step in sin, as we’re going to see in a

moment, is when a person occupies the seat of the scornful.

You see, what you really have here is the evolution of sin. Look at these words again. First of all, you see the man. The man is walking. Then, he's standing. And then, he's sitting. Here's a man walking along, and he meets an acquaintance. And, they walk along together for a while, and they get so interested that they stop and carry on a conversation. And, they become so engrossed in their conversation that they finally sit down. You see, what we're showing here is the evolution of sin. Now, now, don't get me wrong—I don't believe in evolution per se. I'm not talking about, you know, biological evolution. You can if you want to. You ought to know your kinfolks better than I do. But, I don't believe in it. Some of mine hung by the neck, but none of them hung by the tail, amen? But, here is the evolution—the evolution—of a sin. Here, first of all, they're walking, then standing, and then being seated.

Now again, first, here's someone who starts out. He's ungodly. Now, notice this: *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly”*—but the ungodly becomes the sinner—*“nor standeth in the way of [the sinner].”*(Psalms 1:1) And then, the sinner becomes the scornful. Do you see it? First of all, he's not anti-godly; he's just ungodly. He ends up anti-godly. You see, at first he is irreligious, and then he's immoral, and then he is immovable. You see, the last stage is when he becomes a scorner. That's the worst stage; that's the final stage. And so, the man of God—there are certain people, there are certain companions, that he needs to shun. He needs to stay away from these things, whether they be professors or whether they be friends or whatever they're going to be. The Bible says, *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”*(Psalms 1:1)

II. The Communion That He Seeks

But, not only from the negative viewpoint—the companions that he shuns—but I want you to see from the positive viewpoint the communion that he seeks. Notice the word as it turns here on the word *but*: *“But”*—in verse 2—*“his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”*(Psalms 1:2) And, there are three things I want to say about this verse, as we see the communion that you must seek. There are three things that must mark the blessed man when it comes to the Word of God. He's not going to get his inspiration, he's not going to get his information, he's not going to get his attitudes from the ungodly world, but he's going to get it from the Word of God. And, according to this verse, as I see it, there are three things about the man of God and the Word of God: number one, he appreciates the Word; number two, he assimilates the Word; number three, he appropriates the Word.

A. He Appreciates the Word of God

Now, he appreciates the Word. Look at it: *“his delight is in the law of the LORD.”* (Psalms 1:2) He just simply loves the Word of God. From the time I have been saved I have loved the Word of God. I’ve not loved it as I could have loved it—ought to have loved it—but the Bible is precious to me. If there’s been any secret to my poor ministry, it has been the Word of God that is *“quick, and powerful, and sharper than [a] twoedged sword.”* (Hebrews 4:12) Many people claim to be Christians, but they don’t love God’s Word—and I can’t understand that. A man and his word may be different, but God and His Word are not that easily separated. To love God is to love His Word and is to be a powerful preacher. To be a man of God is to love the Bible. I heard of a preacher who came and visited a woman, and she was trying to show off a little bit. It was time to read the Scriptures, so she told her little boy, “Go get that book that mother loves so well.” Well, he came back with the Sears catalog. Now, we need to love the Word of God.

B. He Assimilates the Word of God

Now, this blessed man appreciates the Word of God, but not only does he appreciate the Word of God; he assimilates the Word of God, for it says, *“In his law doth he meditate day and night.”* (Psalms 1:2) And, I’ve told you before, this word *meditate* means literally “to chew the cud.”

Now, if you’re a country boy like I’m not, you know that “to chew the cud” is what a cow does. This cow goes out there, and then browses in the field, and takes that alfalfa in, and takes that bahia in, and takes that clover in early in the morning. Bessie goes out and loads up on this, and then, later on, she lies down under a tree and begins to meditate. That is, she gets to thinking about that clover and says, “Clover please.” And, the cow has several stomachs, and in one stomach there’s clover; and up comes clover. And, Bessie will just chew on clover a while, and down it’ll go again. And then, Bessie will say, “Alfalfa please.” Up comes alfalfa, and she’ll chew on alfalfa again; and it goes back down again. And then, “Bahia please,” and up it comes. Now, she has loaded up in the morning, and all through the day she meditates on it. That’s exactly what we need to do. We need to so love the Word of God that all through the day—wherever we are and whatever we’re doing—we can go back to that quiet time we had with God and meditate, ruminate, on the Word of God.

C. He Appropriates the Word of God

Not only must we, therefore, appreciate the Word of God, but when we appreciate the Word of God, we will assimilate the Word of God. And, when we have assimilated the Word of God, then we can appropriate the Word of God. The Bible says here, *“And in his law doth he meditate day and night.”* (Psalms 1:2) Now, notice—the man of God is

not under the law; he is in the law. What a difference! That is, he literally appropriates the Word of God. Night and day it has meaning and relevance to his life. It is not a burden to him; it is a blessing to him. It is not something that he has to do; it is something that he gets to do, because he's found that God's words are life as he appropriates the Word of God day by day. And, let me say this: that not only must you, therefore, learn it; you must live it. And, you never really lived it—excuse me, you've never really learned it—until you live it.

III. The Character That He Shows

Now, the third thing I want you to see: not only the companions that he shuns (in verse 1), and not only the communion that he seeks (in verse 2), but I want you to see the character, therefore, that he shows (in verse 3): *“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”*(Psalms 1:3) Now, what is the character that he will show? Well, God here uses a figure of speech, a simile or a metaphor—I'm never quite sure which is which. But, He uses a figure of speech to say here that the man of God is like a tree. That's a simile, isn't it? Okay, he's like a tree. And, why is the man of God like a tree? Well, number one: The man of God who has been shunning evil communications and the man of God who's been seeking godly communion is going to show certain character qualities in his life and in his ministry.

A. He Will Show Vitality

Number one: Like a tree, he will show vitality—vitality. The emphasis here is the tree is a living thing as over against chaff, which is dead. Notice here he says, *“The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff.”*(Psalms 1:4) Now, the difference between a tree and chaff—one difference—of course, is life. That is, you will have life. And, when you have life, you will minister life. Dead sermons come from dead preachers. Boring sermons come from bored preachers. Living sermons come from living preachers. The man of God, who has been sinking his roots down deep into the river of revival and to a refreshing streams of God's Word, is *“like a tree planted by the rivers of water.”*(Psalms 1:3) He will have vitality. Jesus said, *“[I've] come that [you] might have life...and have it...abundantly.”*(John 10:10)

B. He Will Show Stability

But, not only will the character that he shows be one of vitality; it will also be one of stability—stability: *“He shall be like a tree planted...”*(Psalms 1:3) And again, God is contrasting the tree with the chaff: *“The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”*(Psalms 1:4) You see, you're going to know storms in the ministry. You'll know storms in life. All of us know one. And, the winds of adversity and

difficulty are going to blow. But, the reason the tree remains there is that the tree is planted—it is rooted; it is grounded. That’s the reason the Apostle Paul said in Colossians chapter 1, verse 23: *“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away...”*(Colossians 1:23) That’s the way we’re to be—rooted in the faith, grounded, settled, unmovable.

And so, you see, the idea here is not only vitality, but stability. You see, this is a tree that God has planted. This is not just any tree. Look at it. It didn’t just spring up. This says, *“And he shall be like a tree planted...”*(Psalms 1:3) The very fact that this tree is there is not happenstance. God planted this tree. You know what Jesus said? He may have had this psalm in mind. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 15, verse 13: *“Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.”*(Matthew 15:13) But, aren’t you glad that the man of God, who has this vitality, also has this stability?

C. He Will Show Fertility

But, wait a minute—let me show you something else about his character. The preacher, the man of God, the woman of God—anybody—not only is going to have vitality, not only stability, but he’s going to have fertility—fertility. Notice also here God’s Word says, *“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.”*(Psalms 1:3) He’s going to be a very fruitful tree. Jesus said, *“[You’ve] not chosen me...[I’ve] chosen you, and [I’ve] ordained you, that [you] should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.”*(John 15:16) No preacher will have a fruitful ministry who does not shun evil companions and does not seek godly communion and does not put his roots down deep into the river of God’s Word. He will never have a fruitful ministry. The Bible says in the book of Galatians, chapter 5, verse 22: *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness temperance.”*(Galatians 5:22–23) This fruit grows on the godly tree, and it is the fruit of the Spirit. And, that river of revival is God’s Holy Spirit, and our roots must go down deep into God’s Holy Spirit.

Now, the chaff has no fruitfulness. As a matter of fact, the fruit has been taken from the chaff. All the chaff is the husks with the fruit taken out. You’re going to find out, dear friend, that many people don’t have the fruit of the Spirit because they don’t have the life of the Spirit. And, we’re trying to teach church members how to be full of love, and how to be full of joy, and how to be full of gentleness, and temperance, and faithfulness. It’s a waste of time. It’s like trying to teach billy goats not to butt. They’ve never been saved. They’ve never been born again. They don’t have that vitality. They don’t have that stability. And, therefore, they cannot have that fertility. But, a tree planted by the rivers of water brings forth fruit.(Psalms 1:3)

D. He Will Show Consistency

But, not only will the character that he show be fertility; it will also be consistency. Look again at it: “[and] his leaf also shall not wither.”(Psalms 1:3) He will be perennially green. He’s God’s evergreen in season and out of season. He is a man for all seasons. He is God’s man, and his leaf will not wither. He will not turn brown. Listen, the reason is his roots stay there in that river of revival, and the reason we have dry rot is because we have dry roots. Now, the roots are unseen; the leaves are seen. But, you cannot see the part of a preacher’s life—his private life. God sees that. That’s the hidden part; that’s the root part. What you can see is the leaf. And, this is not only true about ministers; it’s true about all of us. But, I want to say this: if the outward life is green, it means that the roots have gone down deep. But, if the outward life withers, it means there’s something wrong with the root system.

Now, “he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters.”(Psalms 1:3) There’s no minister that can afford the luxury of being away from a quiet time with God. And, those of you who are members of this wonderful church—and I know you’re wonderful people because you’ve come here to show your love for your pastor—you must absolutely see to it that he has time to be alone with God, that his roots go down deep, that his leaves stay forever green, and that that fruit applies on his life. If you don’t, you’ll harm his life, and in harming his life, you’ll harm your own.

I understand the chairman of the deacons is here. Where is he? Lift your hand. Where’s the chairman of the deacons? Is he here? Chairman, you ought to tell this young pastor, “Pastor, we don’t want you doing anything we can do.” Now, we’re going to do everything we can do so he can do the things we can’t do. And, he’s to come to that pulpit red-hot, full of the Word of God, with his roots down deep and his leaves green every Sunday. And, that doesn’t happen just by a will of the wisp, and it’s up to you to see to it. You’re not hiring him to do your work for you. He’s no hireling. “[A] hireling fleeth.”(John 10:13) “The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”(John 10:11) In the true sense, you don’t even pay his salary. You give your money to God. God pays him. He’s God’s man. And, he must have time for prayer and the ministry of the Word. He is to have a life—a life that is a life of consistency, that his leaf will not wither, that he will be consistent in season and out of season. Whether it’s winter, spring, fall, or summer, it makes no difference—he’ll have those green leaves.

E. He Will Show Prosperity

And so, the character that he shows is vitality, and the character that he shows is stability. And, the character that he shows is fertility, and the character that he shows is consistency. And then, the sum total of this is the character that he shows is prosperity. Look again at it: “and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”(Psalms 1:3)The Bible says

that God “[takes] pleasure in the prosperity of his [servants].”(Psalms 35:27) The Bible says that “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,”(Isaiah 54:17) but that the man of God should always prosper. Now, this verse either needs to be believed or taken out of the Bible, and it says, “*Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”(Psalms 1:3)

Now, right away we’re going to have to understand you don’t spell prosper M-O-N-E-Y, especially if you’re a young preacher starting out. Most of these churches say, “Lord, you keep him humble; we’ll keep him poor.” I heard about one preacher who went to cash his check, and he was just starting out in the ministry. And, the bank teller said, “Oh, I hate to give you these old dirty bills.” He said, “Don’t worry about it. No germs could live on my salary.” Well now, you folks see to it that these folks are taken care of, but that’s not the kind of prosperity God is talking about here: “*whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”(Psalms 1:3) That means that God’s going to have His hand upon your ministry—God’s going to have His hand upon your life. *Prosperity is the continual achieving of the will of God for one’s life.* That is prosperity, and this is—this is—God’s plan for blessings.

Now, it’s not so with the ungodly. Sometimes the people of the world seem to prosper, and we look at them and we say they’re prospering. But, we make the mistake of equating the fact that they’re living high, wide, and handsome with prosperity. But, we ought not to envy those people, because that would be like envying a pig that’s being fattened for the slaughter. Look at what God says here in verse 4: “*The ungodly are not so*”—that is, they do not prosper—“*but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.*”(Psalms 1:4–6) Now, what is this saying? It is saying that it’s going to take another world, really, to show where real and true prosperity is. “There’s a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar.” But, the ungodly are not going to see it. They’re going to perish. The Bible says they’re “*like the chaff which the wind [blows] away.*”(Psalms 1:4)

When I’ve been in Israel some—many—times, I’ve seen that chaff as they have the winnowing floor out there. And, they take that wheat and put it on the winnowing floor there. And, the animal goes ’round and ’round on it—an oxen or a horse—until by the hooves of that animal the wheat is separated from the husk or the chaff that’s around. And then, they have a winnowing fork or a big pitchfork, and they just keep throwing that grain in the air. And, as they throw that grain in the air, the wind comes along and just blows the husks, the chaff, off to the side. Now, what is that wind of death—or, what is that wind—that blows away the ungodly? It’s the wind of death.

You see, here’s an ungodly man. He’s been living high, wide, and handsome. He doesn’t care for God. He’s perhaps occupying now the seat of the scornful. Maybe he’s

just walking in the way of sinners, or maybe he is standing in the counsel of the ungodly. But, he dies outside the Lord, but here's how it happened. One day everything feels just fine. He's going along just as well as he was before, but he feels a little breeze. It's the wind of death, but he doesn't know it; and it passes by. The next day he feels that same breeze. He says, "That's strange. There...no wind is in here. Where did that breeze come from?" Third day it blows a little colder. And, he goes to the doctor, and he says, "Doctor, I felt a little breeze today, Doctor. It was blowing on me. Doctor, could you and your medical art—could you stand between me and the breeze, keep the breeze off of me?" And, the doctor says, "Well, I'll try." And, after a while, the wind just seems to blow around the doctor. And, he says, "Doctor, you're not keeping the breeze off of me." And, the doctor says, "There's nothing I can do to stand between you and that breeze." And, that little breeze becomes a storm, and that storm becomes a howling hurricane that freezes his blood; and he dies. That's what the psalmist is talking about. *"The ungodly are not so: [they're] like the chaff which the wind driveth away."*(Psalms 1:4)

But, where are they driven? Where do they end up? Let Jesus tell us. Jesus said, *"The chaff [shall be burned] with unquenchable fire."*(Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17) It'll take another world. What I'm saying is it'll take another world to show where real prosperity is. You see, when God says, *"Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper,"*(Psalms 1:3) He's not saying that we're going to live in a mansion, necessarily—not saying that we're going to wear the finest clothes, eat the best food. But, it is saying that we're going to have the joy that can be compared with no other joy. Sometimes good times may come. Paul said, "I know how to abound. I know how to be abased." (Philippians 4:12) But, he said, *"[I've] learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."*(Philippians 4:11) Paul had learned the secret of Psalm 1, that blessed man, and whatever he did would prosper.

Conclusion

And, young preacher, deacons, Sunday School teachers, I would to God that we could take Psalm 1 and look at it again and see the companions that we must shun—their sensual wisdom, their sinful ways, their scornful words—see the communion that we ought to seek—we ought to appreciate the Word of God; we ought to assimilate the Word of God; and then, we ought to appropriate the Word of God—and, when we do that, see the character that we'll show—that vitality, that stability, that fertility, that constancy, and that prosperity that God wants every one of His children to experience. I want you to be a "tree-mendous" Christian. Let's bow together in prayer.

The Ultimate Triumph

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: May 8, 1996

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 2

“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

PSALMS 2:6

Outline

Introduction

- I. What the Sinful People Say
 - A. Violent Rage
 - B. Vicious Rebellion
 - C. Vain Reasoning
- II. What the Sovereign God Says
 - A. Derision
 - B. Displeasure
 - C. Determination
- III. What the Saving Son Says
 - A. His Divine Position
 - B. His Divine Purpose
 - C. His Divine Power
- IV. What the Seeking Spirit Says
 - A. A Word of Exhortation
 - B. A Word of Invitation
 - C. A Word of Admonition

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you be finding Psalms chapter 2, the second psalm. And, when you've found it, look up here. I don't know about you, but I know this about me: if I am in any contest, any fight, any game, I like to win. I like to be on the winning side. And, I've got good news for you: as Christians, we are on the winning side. And, we need to understand that, because I'm speaking tonight from Psalm 2 on this subject: "The Ultimate Triumph."

Psalms number 2 is a psalm that speaks of the ultimate conquest of the Lamb of God that we just heard about a few moments ago. I'm going to read this psalm. It's a short psalm—only twelve verses. Every one of them is spiritual dynamite. Listen to them. It begins with a question: *“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a*

vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed”—you may translate that “against His Christ,” because that’s literally what the word Christ means: “the Anointed One.” “Against His Christ”—“saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” (Psalms 2:1–12) In whom? In the Son of God, the Anointed, the Messiah, the Christ of God.

It was Woodrow Wilson who said on one occasion, I believe, “I had rather temporarily fail with a cause that must ultimately succeed than to temporarily succeed with a cause that must ultimately fail.” Because of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our cause cannot fail. And, I love that song that says:

*Have faith in God, He’s on His throne;
Have faith in God, He watches o’er His own.
He cannot fail, He must prevail;
Have faith in God, have faith in God.*

—BAYLUS BENJAMIN MCKINNEY

And so, this psalm, Psalm 2, is a psalm of prophecy and it is a psalm of the ultimate triumph of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, it’s the kind of song that ought to cause you to square your shoulders, hold up your chin, put a smile on your face, and walk in victory. Now, I want you to see what this psalm is. Actually, you have four voices that are speaking in this psalm.

I. What the Sinful People Say

And, the first voice that you hear is the sinful people. The sinful people speak, and their voice is a voice of consternation. They don’t know what to do. Look, if you will, as they speak.

A. Violent Rage

First of all, they speak with rage in verses 1 and 2: “*Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*” (Psalms 2:1) Now, why do people rage? Have you ever

seen anyone in a rage? Do you know why people get in a rage? When they're out of control, they don't know what to do. They're in consternation. Have you ever noticed that when a man gets in an argument and he's losing, he gets louder? He gets red in the face. That's what these people are doing.

Now, why—why—do people rage today? Why is there so much war, so much hatred? Men's hearts and minds are inflamed. People today are violent and filled with rage. This psalm asks this question: "*Why do the [people] rage...?*" (Psalms 2:1) Well, look around. Suppose you did not know the Lord. Suppose you were not saved. Suppose you did not understand the truth of God's Word. You, too, would be in such consternation you would be turned to rage.

Think about crime. A crime leader boasted not long ago that organized crime is bigger than the United States government. He may be right. Think about what's happening in the world of science. For the first time, we're afraid of what we know. And, I've been doing some reading here lately about genetic engineering and where people now are beginning to go into the laboratory to even create new life forms. Yet we tremble at the technological ability to destroy the world, to obliterate the world with atomic energy or now with nerve gas and poison gases. Think about what is happening to the home. The stable basis of society—the home that we've known here in America—is literally unraveling, and termites of sin, and greed, and pride, and ego, and hatefulness are eating away the foundation of the home. Think about terrorism that is now reaching America's shores. It's not the America we used to know. If you've ridden in an airplane lately, you know what I'm talking about. Now you have to show your ID with your photo. Now they check you out. Now they ask you this question: "Did anybody give you anything to carry onto this airplane?" And, we are under constant surveillance. I was reading in our newspaper here in Memphis, Tennessee, just recently how television cameras have been posted downtown to constantly sweep the downtown area. Somebody is watching you. Big Brother is watching you, or maybe it's "Big Sister," but we'll leave that out. Somebody is watching you right now, and all through your life you're under surveillance now because what we used to think of as being on other shores is on our shores.

A French philosopher said this: "There is no exit from the human dilemma." And, some years ago, before Winston Churchill died, Winston Churchill, who was the one who said, "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never, never give up," Winny Churchill said before he died, "Our problems are beyond us. Our problems are beyond us." And, you would feel that way if you did not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. **Vicious Rebellion**

So, first of all, there is rage, and right under rage write the word *rebellion*. Notice in

verse 2: “[And] the kings of the earth set themselves”—see them now as they square their jaws. They—“set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD”—that is, against Jehovah—“and against his anointed” (Psalms 2:2)—that is, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the answer to the question in verse 1 is found in verse 2. Why do they rage? Well, I’ll tell you why they rage: they have rejected the Lord Jesus in rebellion. And, the fear, the pain, the war, the death are because man, in his pride, and the rulers of this world have rejected our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ came to this earth the first time and split the centuries in two, Jesus came to the Roman world of government, He came to the Greek world of culture, and He came to the Jewish world of religion. And, all three rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, and the same is true today. Our government has no place for the Lord Jesus Christ today. We’re told that we cannot praise Him in our public assemblies, lest we be accused of somehow uniting Church and State. And, we think that we’re going to handle the situation without the Lord Jesus Christ, but we just move from one dilemma to the other. In the world of culture, there’s no room for the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you imagine going to Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, or one of the great universities of this world, standing up in an assembly, and saying, “Sirs and ladies, the answer is Jesus Christ”? Say that in the halls of academia. They’ll laugh you to scorn. Or, in the world of religion even—we have a syncretism today. And, in many of our so-called “Christian” churches, if you stand up and say that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, they’ll call you a bigot; they’ll call you narrow. Now, we have churches that have crosses planted on top who deny both the book or through the book the blood and the blessed hope of the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So, you see, there’s rage in verse 1 because there is rebellion in verse 2.

C. **Vain Reasoning**

But now, the rage and the rebellion is followed by a perverse reasoning. Look, if you will, again in verse 2: the Bible says in verse 2 that they “take counsel together”—“[they] take counsel together.” (Psalms 2:2) It’s not that this is done by happenstance. It is not that they merely ignore the Lord Jesus. They actually plot against Him. The word *counsel* here is the same word that’s used for *meditate* in Psalm 1. It’s a thought-out plan. They begin to rationalize away eternal truths.

We have a president of the United States that has recently vetoed a bill that would outlaw a partial-birth abortion. That means that a partially-born baby—I mean, with the part of the baby’s body out of the birth canal—can be put to death. Yes, mercy. God have mercy on us. Now, what kind of evil mind could conceive of such a thing? Are you telling me that several inches down the birth canal is going to make the difference between medicine and murder? The reasoning, the way these people put their minds

together—they “*take counsel together.*” (Psalms 2:2) Nazi Germany had some brilliant minds. The Soviets, who put to death literally millions of people in the name of communism, had brilliant minds. So, what do you have here? You have rage. You have rebellion. You have reasoning—all of it set on fire of hell. They “*take counsel...against the LORD.*” (Psalms 2:2)

Did you know that we founded the United Nations in 1945? And, in order to appease the communists, in the Charter of the United Nations, we left out God. There is no reference to God in the Charter of the U.N. Now, why was the U.N. formed? Well, the U.N. was formed to bring peace to the world. Since that period of time, we’ve had more war than in any other period of time in the history of this planet.

I was recently in Washington, D.C., and we were staying there in a hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. We’d just gotten into the hotel. I told Joyce—I said, “Look. They’re blocking off the streets. All of the motorcycle policemen are there. They’re barricading the streets. Some...something important is about to happen. Someone important is about to come.” So, we went to the window and watched. We were... We had a ringside seat, looking right down on what was happening. After a while, an entourage of security forces began to come—more and more policemen, more and more barricades. And then, a long black limousine drove up, and I said, “Who is in that limousine? Let’s see.” The glasses were darkened. And finally, at an appropriate moment, surrounded by security, a little man got out about that high wearing an Arab headdress—a checkered Arab headdress. It was Yasser Arafat. He got out and went in a door there of the hotel that was right across the street from where we were. And, I said, “Well, that’s interesting, isn’t it, Joyce? That’s Yasser Arafat.”

Then, we waited a while, and more security forces came, more automobiles. They stopped traffic in every direction. And, another big black limousine came up—this time, a complete different set of security people. This time, they came, and they were looking in garbage cans, looking here and there. We’re looking down on the whole thing. I said, “Joyce, I wonder who that could be?” And, we watched, and under extreme security, just with everything just shrouding this man, Shimon Peres got out from Israel. He went in the same door of that same hotel right across the street. And, I thought to myself, “You know, the climax of this world’s wars is going to happen, and the conflict between the nations and the peoples represented right there—the Arab faction, the Jewish factor. There’s so much war. The Middle East is such a tinderbox.” And, I thought, “How symbolic that is.”

But, after it was all cleared and they had come, and met, and gone, I walked across the street and I asked somebody, “What is this?” They said, “It’s the Willard Hotel.” And, I looked up on that hotel, and right by the door where those two men walked in, do you know what it said? It said that “here, in this hotel, Julia Ward Howe wrote the Battle

Hymn of the Republic.” And, I thought, “My, what does the Battle Hymn of the Republic say?” It says:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.*

— JULIA WARD HOWE

And, I thought about that, and I said, “There’s no Arab who accepts Christ as the Messiah of the world. There is no practicing Jew that accepts Christ as the Messiah of the world. And yet, here, under great, great security…” Oh, there are plenty of Arabs and Jews who do, but I’m talking about those who follow the multitudes in their particular nations. And, I thought, “There you have a great host of nations represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization, who reject our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” There are many precious Jewish friends who are trying to settle this situation in the Middle East, but I want to tell you something, friend: that is a fulfillment of this verse: “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together*”—I watched them go in that door to—“*take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*” (Psalms 2:2–3) Now, it would be unfair to say that they said that inside that hotel over there, but I can tell you, they do not accept or receive Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Lord of this world.

So, what you have is rage—violent rage—vicious rebellion, and vain reasoning. Now, that’s what the sinful people say.

II. What the Sovereign God Says

What does the sovereign God say? Well, look in verses 4 through 6, and you’re going to hear God speak now. The people have spoken, and they’ve said in the first three verses, “We don’t want the Lord. We don’t want His Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One.” Now, God speaks, and I want you to see what God says now in verses 4 through 6. Here’s what the sovereign God says: “*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*” (Psalms 2:4–6) Now, I want you to see what God’s voice says.

A. Derision

First of all, God uses what I’m going to call “the voice of derision.” The Bible says God laughs. God laughs in verse 4: “*The LORD [will] have them in derision.*” (Psalms 2:4) Do you see it? Now, what does that mean? Well, God is not laughing because He thinks it’s

funny. This is not humor; this is irony. God is mocking puny man as they say, “No God for us. God, we’re—the world’s in a dilemma—and we’re in a rage, but we’re not going to settle it with you.” And so, this world that has its obscene laughs...

By the way, Don Rickles, who I think is probably the world’s worst comedian, makes his money cutting people down, belittling people. Don Rickles said, “The truth is there are no sacred cows any more. Even religion is no longer sacred. You can use language you couldn’t use before.” He thinks that’s wonderful to get people to laugh cheap laughs. We have a saying, “He who laughs last laughs best.” The Lord will laugh. “[*God will*] have them in derision.” (Psalms 2:4) It’s irony. I think of old Pharaoh, who was going to destroy all the little Egyptian—excuse me, all the little Hebrew—babies down in Egypt. And, God caused Pharaoh’s daughter to raise up little Moses. Pharaoh paid for his education. Don’t you think there must have been some laughter in heaven? I mean, this—this—is the irony of this whole thing.

B. Displeasure

First of all, there’s derision, but not only derision—there’s displeasure. Look, if you will, in verse 5: “*Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.*” (Psalms 2:5) Now, God is a God of wrath. And, verse 5 speaks of God’s wrath; it speaks of His displeasure. What is this verse prophesying? It’s prophesying the battle of Armageddon. It’s “*the great day of [God’s] wrath*” (Revelation 6:17) that we read about in the book of the Revelation. This world is on a collision course with judgment, and it is surely coming. God is going to speak, and when He does, He’s going to speak in His wrath—He’s going to speak in His displeasure. I don’t know when that is going to be, but to quote the words of another, “Even now, as I speak to you, the raging waters of God’s wrath are furiously pounding against the dam of His mercy.” One of these days, the dam of God’s mercy will give way to the raging waters of God’s wrath. Verse 5 speaks of it clearly and plainly: derision, displeasure.

C. Determination

But, I love the next one: determination. There’s one little word in this psalm that blesses me. Every time I read it I have to stop and think about it. I taste it in my mouth. And, it’s one of my favorite psalms. It’s verse 6—the first word: *yet*. I love that—I love that. Yet! Yet what? Yet—in spite of the rantings, the ravings, the rebellions, the reasoning, the rage; in spite of all that men can do; in spite of the fact that they’ve said, ‘We’re going to cast His bonds from us,’ yet,” God says, “yet I’m going to set my Son, my King, upon my holy hill of Zion.” (Psalms 2:6) That’s determination. In spite of the rantings of the atheists who don’t want creationism taught in schools, in spite of the scorn of modernists and liberals who try to take away the deity of our virgin-born Lord, in spite of the abject ignorance of mankind, in spite of all of the schemings and imaginations of

Satan—in spite of all that—there is a big *yet*. God says, “*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*” (Psalms 2:6) I love it.

Where does He do it? In Zion. Where’s Zion? That’s Jerusalem. The very city where they crucified Him, where they plucked the beard from Him, where they beat Him, where they spat upon Him, where they nailed Him to the cross, there, God says, “I’m going to crown Him—I’m going to crown Him.” Yet, yet—in spite of all that they do—God speaks. He speaks in derision; He speaks in displeasure, but He speaks in determination. God has His heart set on this. You can bank on it. God will do it. Jesus will be crowned in Zion. Be sure of it. “*Yet—“yet—“have I set my [Son] upon my holy hill of Zion.*” (Psalms 2:6) And, all hell can’t stop it.

III. What the Saving Son Says

Now, the sinful people speak. The sovereign God speaks. And now, the saving Son speaks. Listen to Jesus when He speaks in verses 7 through 9: Jesus now says, “*I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee*”—“ask God the Father, and I will give thee (God the Son)”—“*the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*” (Psalms 2:7–8) Now, what does the Son speak when He speaks?

A. His Divine Position

First of all, He speaks of His divine position. What is His divine position? He’s the Son of God. I don’t know how a Jew who claimed to believe the Old Testament could get past this: God has a Son. And, that Son is equated, in this psalm, with the Anointed, with the Messiah. And, *you’ll never settle the sin question until you settle the Son question.* To refuse the Son is to refuse the Father. John 3, verses 35 and 36: Jesus said, “*The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*” (John 3:35–36) To honor the Son is to honor the Father. To honor the Father is to honor the Son. To receive the Father is to receive the Son. To receive the Son is to receive the Father. Notice again: “*I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*” (Psalms 2:7) That speaks of the virgin birth of our Lord and Savior, begotten in the womb of Mary by the Holy Ghost. Now, you see, He speaks of His divine position. He’s the Son of God.

B. His Divine Purpose

He speaks of His divine purpose. What is His purpose? Verse 8: “*Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*” (Psalms 2:8) Why is this earth here? Why are the nations here described

as the heathen? That means those who do not yet know Him. Why are they spoken of here, and why are we here? Why was it all made? Well, you need to read the book of Colossians, and you'll find out that it was all made by Him, it was all made for Him, and it is all coming to Him. Yes, one of these days the Lord Jesus will rule and reign here on this earth. I love that song, Brother Jim Whitmire, that says, "Jesus shall reign where'ere the sun doth His successive journeys run. His kingdom spread from shore to shore 'til moon shall wax and wane no more." That's what this verse is talking about. "*Ask of me, and [I'll] give [you] the heathen...and the uttermost parts of the earth for [your] possession.*" (Psalms 2:8) So, the Son speaks of His divine position. He's God's Son. He speaks of His divine purpose—to rule and to reign.

C. His Divine Power

And, He speaks of His divine power. Look in verse 9: "*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*" (Psalms 2:9) This is God the Son quoting God the Father, saying to God the Son, "Son, I'm giving you all power, and you're going to rule. You have divine power." Now, I've said Psalm 2 is one of my favorite psalms, and I'll tell you why Psalm 2 is one of my favorite psalms: because of another verse in the New Testament, 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 15, which, I mean, really, is one of my top ten. And, here's what it says: it speaks of the Lord Jesus, and it says, "*Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and [the] Lord of lords.*" (1 Timothy 6:15) Don't you like that verse? Isn't that a great verse? Listen to it. It speaks of His time. You see, God is never ahead of time. He's never late. God's never in a hurry. God knows exactly, precisely what He's doing. He says, "I am going to set my Son upon my holy hill of Zion, and He's going to rule the nations with a rod of iron, which in his times he shall show who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords." (Psalms 2:6; 1 Timothy 6:15)

So, He speaks. When the Son speaks, the Son speaks of His divine position, His divine purpose, and His divine power. Friend, I want to tell you something: when you follow Jesus Christ, you're not following a loser. He must win. He cannot fail. Sin cannot win. Satan sails a sinking ship. He rules a doomed domain. Truth is stronger than error. Love is stronger than hate. Holiness is higher than sin. And, Satan cannot even be compared to the Lord Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

IV. What the Seeking Spirit Says

Now, the sinful people speak. The sovereign God speaks. The saving Son speaks. And now, the seeking Spirit speaks. The Holy Spirit speaks. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks in verses 10 through 12. Now, the Spirit of God, who inspired this psalm, begins to speak to the reader of this psalm. He begins to speak to your heart. If you're here

tonight and you're not a child of God—you're not saved—the Holy Spirit now is taking all of this and speaking to you. And, how does He speak?

A. A Word of Exhortation

First of all, there's the voice of exhortation. He exhorts you to do something. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth."* (Psalms 2:10) What's the Holy Spirit saying? "Wise up!" Here's a voice of exhortation. He's saying, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."* (Proverbs 9:10) *"The holy scriptures...are able to make [us] wise unto salvation."* (2 Timothy 3:15) So, here is a verse of exhortation. Be wise! Pay attention! Listen! Listen! Listen to the inspired Word of God. It's a word of exhortation.

B. A Word of Invitation

And then, there's a word of invitation. Listen to verses 11 and 12: *"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way."* (Psalms 2:11–12) This is perhaps the sweetest invitation in all of the Bible. Those who have rebelled against Him, those who've been in rage and rebellion, those who've taken counsel against Him—the Holy Spirit says, "Hey, wise up! Listen! Come to Him. Give Him the kiss of love and of devotion."

I love a scripture in Luke chapter 7, verses 44 and following. It speaks of Jesus. A woman had just kissed the feet of Jesus. *"And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, [and] thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. [Therefore] I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she [loveth] much."* (Luke 7:44–47) Isn't that beautiful? That's what He's talking about now. He's talking about loving Jesus: "Kiss the Son of God. Put the kiss of faith upon His brow of grace. Lavish your love upon the Son of God." The Holy Spirit is giving a word of admonition, and the Holy Spirit is saying, "Wise up!" The Holy Spirit is giving a word of invitation. He's saying, "He will receive you. Come kiss the Lord Jesus Christ. Kiss the Son."

C. A Word of Admonition

But, He ends with a word of admonition. There's a warning. Look at verse 12 again: *"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."* (Psalms 2:12) He is a God of wrath. The person who insists on holding on to his sin and rebelling against the Lord Jesus will inevitably be judged with his sin, and he will perish. And, the day of wrath is at hand.

Conclusion

Now, there's a conclusion in verse 12, and I love it. Read the conclusion: "*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*" (Psalms 2:12) That literally reads, "Blessed are all they that find refuge in him." Outside of Him—outside of Jesus—there's danger, there's death and doom. Inside Jesus there's safety, and certainty, and great, great joy. Find your refuge. Find your rest. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if there were ever a psalm for our day, I believe this psalm is the psalm for our day. To those of us who are saved, there may be some bad days coming. But folks, I want to tell you again from my heart—listen to me now; look up here, and let me tell you something—we are on the winning side. Jesus is coming. And, Almighty God has said, "I'm going to set my Son upon my holy hill of Zion." (Psalms 2:6)

You ever play checkers? A checkerboard, you know... You're playing checkers. The idea—in order to win the game, you take your checkers and you maneuver your checkers across the board until you get in king's row. And, when you get in king's row, you say to your opponent, "Crown me"—"crown me." God is the One who is maneuvering the affairs of this earth. And, soon—and very soon—He's going to move His Son into King's row and say, "Crown Him!" "*Yet have I set my [Son] upon my holy hill of Zion.*" (Psalms 2:6) Won't it be a day when Jesus comes? Hallelujah!

Let's bow together in prayer. Lord Jesus, we now, this moment, extend to you the kiss of love, and devotion, and faith. Thank you for being such a dear Savior. And Lord, thank you for being such a mighty conqueror. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

When Will There Be Peace on Earth?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 24, 1989

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 2:7

*"I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me,
Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."*

PSALMS 2:7

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Voice of the Sinful People
 - A. The Voice of Violent Rage
 - B. The Voice of Vicious Rebellion
 - C. The Voice of Vain Reasoning
- II. The Voice of the Sovereign God
 - A. The Voice of Derision
 - B. The Voice of Displeasure
 - C. The Voice of Determination
- III. The Voice of the Saving Son
 - A. His Divine Position
 - B. His Divine Purpose
 - C. His Divine Power
- IV. The Voice of the Seeking Spirit
 - A. A Word of Exhortation
 - B. A Word of Invitation
 - C. A Word of Admonition

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles today now for our Bible study, our Christmas Bible study, and turn to Psalm 2, the second Psalm. It dawned on me that Psalm 2 has much to say to us about Christmas. As a matter of fact, it is a Christmas Psalm. I've never preached it on Christmas, but it is a Christmas Psalm. Look, if you will, in Psalm 2, verse 7. The Lord Jesus is speaking, and He says, *"I will declare the decree: the LORD"*—that is, Jehovah—*"hath said unto me,"*—Jesus—*"Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee"* (Psalm 2:7). And, it is a Psalm about God's Son, the only begotten, the One who

was born on Christmas day. I want to speak to you on this subject: “When Will There Be Peace on Earth?”—“When Will There Be Peace on Earth?”

You know, Christmas is all about peace. And, many of us have sung that Christmas carol,

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.
And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men....
And in despair I bowed my head
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.”*

—HENRY W. LONGFELLOW

But, the question comes, when is that peace going to come? And, how is that peace going to come? There’s no doubt about it. Isaiah said that His name is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). And, when those angels appeared, Luke 2, verse 14, tells us that they were there singing, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men*” (Luke 2:14). Yet, we look around at a world torn with war. Have you ever seen more going on internationally and domestically, more wars, more skirmishes, more terrorism, more fear, and more upheaval than ever before? And, the United Nations meets in emergency sessions, and the diplomats get together to plan for peace. But, the world is not in peace; it’s in pieces. I mean, there’s difficulty everywhere.

And, those who are intellectuals just don’t have any hope. One of the men that I admire the most is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. This great, brilliant literary giant and Russian dissident, he said this: “It is too late”—too late—“to avoid a third world war.” Those are heavy words. And, you know Winston Churchill, before he died, just simply said, “Our problems are beyond us.” And then, another man with a great mind, Albert Schweitzer, said, “Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall.” And then, Schweitzer said, “He will end by destroying the earth.” Then, we’ve all watched Henry

Kissinger. Henry Kissinger, this international diplomat, as it were, I can remember him standing there in that war-torn Middle East with tears streaming down his face, and he says, “One has to live with a sense of inevitable tragedy.” Those are heavy words. Those are weighty words.

And yet, 2,000 years ago, a baby came. And, that baby was called the Prince of Peace. And, all of us who are living today feel like we’re looking at the end of a loaded cannon. And, we’re just wondering what’s going to happen next. Our cities are swamps of discontent where the mosquitoes of hate breed by the millions. And, our homes are broken with battered wives and battered children. And, we have a divorce epidemic. And, people who walk the streets of our cities, and walk the streets of this city, they have no peace. They are haunted by the ghost of guilt. Many of them at Christmas season are trying to find peace in the mouth of a bottle, a pill, a toy, a possession, or some cheap thrill. Where is this peace?

Well the Bible says: *“There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked”* (Isaiah 48:22). Were the angels mistaken? Was Isaiah wrong? Is there no Prince of Peace? Will we never have peace? Well, I want you to look at Psalm 2. And, in Psalm 2, you’re going to find out that the answer is right here. The Lord Jesus Christ has not failed, nor can He fail. There’s another song we sing:

*Have faith in God, He’s on His throne,
Have faith in God, He watches o’er His own;
He cannot fail, He must prevail.
Have faith in God, have faith in God.*

—B. B. McKinney

Woodrow Wilson said this: “I had rather temporarily fail with a cause that must ultimately succeed than to temporarily succeed with a cause that must ultimately fail.” And, my dear friend, we are on the winning side. And, what you have in Psalm 2 is a prophecy of the ultimate triumph of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace who came into this world on Christmas day almost 2,000 years ago.

And, really, there are four voices that speak to us in Psalm 2.

I. **The Voice of the Sinful People**

First of all, I want you to see, as we read the first three verses, as the sinful people speak, here’s a world in frustration and consternation, and I want you to hear what these sinners say.

Now, notice in Psalm 2, verses 1 to 3: *“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,”*—now, here’s what they say—*“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us”* (Psalm 2:1–

3). Now, here is what the world is saying this Christmas season. I'm talking about the nations, what the Bible calls here "*the heathen.*" I'm talking about all of the unconverted people of the world. Here's their voice.

A. The Voice of Violent Rage

First of all, it's the voice of violent rage. Look in Psalm 2, verse 1, which asks, "*Why do the heathen rage?*" Do you know what *rage* is? *Rage* is what you do when you don't know what else to do. Isn't that right? I mean, have you ever seen anybody just fly into a rage and just get red in the face? It's because they're frustrated.

I heard about a man who was standing impeccably dressed after a rainstorm. He was standing there on the street, waiting for the bus to come, and an automobile came by. He was there with two other men, a man standing *here* and a man standing *here*. He was standing a little to the front, and a car came by, and the wheel went into the mud puddle and just splashed mud on this man from head to toe. He was in a rage. He turned to the men on either side. He said, "Did you two fools see what that gentleman did to me?" Now, when you get in a rage, you don't even know what you're saying. You're just out of control. *Rage is what you do when you don't know what else to do.*

Now, the world is in consternation. I mean, the world is raging. We look around, and we look at the world of science, and we're afraid of what we have created, because our inventions have outgrown our wisdom. We just look around at the world, and there's no way out. A French philosopher said, "There is no exit from the human dilemma."

B. The Voice of Vicious Rebellion

Now, look here at what the heathen are saying. First of all, there is the voice of violent rage. And then, there's the voice of vicious rebellion. Look again in Psalm 2, verse 2: "*The kings of the earth set themselves...*"—now, here they are taking a stance, square jaw, and they are set. I mean, they are determined—"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed" (Psalm 2:2).

Now, the answer to question number one, why do they rage, is in Psalm 2, verse 2: because they are in rebellion against Almighty God. They just simply, in their pride, have set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed.

Now, notice, "*against the LORD.*" The word *LORD* there is *Jehovah*. "*Against his anointed*": the word there is *Christ*. The word *anointed* means, "the christened one," or, "the Christ." Now, there is in our world today a determination against the Judeo-Christian ethic, against the God that the Jews know as *Jehovah*, and the God that we worship, known as the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a universal rebellion against Him. When Jesus came into the world on Christmas Day so long ago, He came into the Roman world of government. He came into the Greek world of culture. And, He came

into the Jewish world of religion. And, all three of them set themselves against Jehovah and His anointed. And, today the world of government is against the Lord.

Why, it's obvious here in the United States. Why, dear friend, our government is doing everything that it can do to say, "Whatever you do, when you celebrate Christmas, let there be no governmental recognition of Jesus Christ." Take away the manger scenes. Take away the stars. Take away the shepherds. We'll have Christmas, but be sure to leave Jesus out of it. The world of government is always against the Lord Jesus.

We think we're so smart with our government. We just move from one dilemma to another one. The world of culture is against the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you imagine going to one of the great universities of today, standing up, and saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, the answer to our world's dilemma is Jesus Christ"? They'd just simply laugh you away as a crackpot. And yet, human wisdom has failed us.

The world of religion has even rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Did you know that you can go to many churches that bear the name *Christian* and very seldom hear the name of Jesus? And, if you hear His name, it's in a patronizing way. There are many churches today that don't believe that He's the virgin-born Son of God, or the only way to God. And, many churches are little more than glorified country clubs with a steeple on top. And, there are many false religions that are proliferating and going on around the world.

C. The Voice of Vain Reasoning

So, what do you have? First of all, you have violent rage. And then, vicious rebellion. And then, that ends up in what I want to call vain reasoning—vain reasoning. Look, if you will now, in Psalm 2, verse 2. The Bible says that, "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel*" (Psalm 2:2). That is, it's not just something that they let happen. It is something that they plan to happen.

In Psalm 2, verse 1, look at the word *imagine*. Do you see that word *imagine*? "*The people imagine a vain thing.*" Well, if you look in Psalm 1, verse 2: "*But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night*" (Psalm 1:2). In Psalm 1, verse 2, the word *meditate*, and in Psalm 2, verse 1, the word *imagine* are the same word in the Hebrew language. So, this imagination doesn't mean just some vain thought. This is something that the kings of the earth have thought out. This is a worldwide humanism against God.

There is a movement in the world today to rationalize eternal truths. Nazi Germany did it. Soviet Russia did it. And, we are doing it in the United States of America today. There is violent rage. My dear friend, there is vicious rebellion. And, there is vain reasoning.

We wonder why we can't have peace on earth. Did you know that in 1945 all of the

people who ran the U. N., the United Nations, which really stands for the *united nothing*, they got together, and in order to appease the godless communists, they said, “We will leave out any mention of God whatsoever in our charter.” That’s exactly what Psalm 2 is talking about. The Bible says that, “*The rulers take counsel together.*” I mean, all of the people of the earth got together to plan for peace, and they said, “We’ll break the bands asunder; we’ll cast their cords from us. We will get together, and we will plan peace on earth.” And, since 1945, the world has never known more war—never. More war since that period of time than any other time in history.

II. The Voice of the Sovereign God

Now, that’s how the sinful people speak. All right now, the next thing I want you to see. I want you to see not only the voice of the sinful people, but I want you to see now the voice of the sovereign God. Now, God begins to speak. And, look, if you will, in Psalm 2, verses 4 through 6: “*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them...*”—they’ve spoken against Him. Now, He’s going to speak unto them—“*Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*” (Psalm 2:4–6). All right now, in all of this den and all of this noise the voice of Almighty God comes thundering through. And, I want you to listen to what God says, and what His voice is.

A. The Voice of Derision

First of all, his voice is the voice of derision. Psalm 2, verse 4, says that, “*The LORD shall have them in derision*” (Psalm 2:4). That is, that the Lord Himself shall laugh. Now, when God laughs, He doesn’t laugh because He thinks it’s funny. This is not the laughter of humor. It is the laughter of divine irony. Here are these puny men sticking out their big chests, shaking their fist in the face of Almighty God, and saying, “We don’t want you to tell us how to rule this world. We’ll test your bands, and we’ll put your cords off of us. We don’t want any strings attached to us.” And, God looks down from Heaven, and God laughs. It’s the voice of derision.

B. The Voice of Displeasure

But not only is it the voice of derision; it’s the voice of displeasure. Look in Psalm 2, verse 5. The Bible says that, “*Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure*” (Psalm 2:5). God is going to judge the world. He’s going to speak in His wrath. He’s speaking here about the Great Tribulation. And, the Great Tribulation is very near. The Bible calls it “*the great day of his wrath*” (Revelation 6:17). And, just before He sets His king upon His holy hill of Zion, God is going to speak in His wrath.

Now, my dear friend, we're very, very close to the Great Tribulation. We're very, very close to that time when the Antichrist shall rule and reign. I see more harbingers of Antichrist today than I've ever seen in my life. The other day I even opened up the *USA Today* newspaper, and there was a full-page ad by the self-styled messiah, the Reverend Moon. Did you see that in the newspaper? A full-page ad. *USA Today* was talking about the Reverend Moon and how he's going to bring peace on Earth. Friend, I'd a whole lot rather have sunshine than moonlight. As a matter of fact, I'd a whole lot rather have sunlight than moonshine.

All over, we're seeing all of these harbingers. We're seeing the world move to a one-world government. Everybody thought it was wonderful when the head of communism and the head of Catholicism met together. They said, "Isn't that wonderful! The world is finally coming together." And, politics and religion now are beginning to merge. We're getting a one-world government. Friend, it's the stage that's being set.

C. The Voice of Determination

And so, God speaks, first of all, in His derision. Then, God is going to speak in His displeasure. And then, finally, God is going to speak in His determination. One of my favorite verses in all the Bible is Psalm 2, verse 6. Look at it. Oh, it's a great verse! It says, "Yet..."—now, in my Bible, the word *yet* is circled in red. I just love that word *yet*—"Yet..."—now, God is speaking, "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*" (Psalm 2:6).

Now, what does he mean "yet"? He means, in spite of everything that these folks have done, in spite of all of their rebellion, in spite of the ranting of the atheists, in spite of the scorn of the liberals, in spite of the ignorance of mankind, and in spite of the scheming of Satan, I am going to crown My king, the Lord Jesus. "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*" I love this. No wonder God laughs. All of these people are talking about what they're going to do, and God says, "I'm going to put My king upon My holy hill."

Do you know what He's talking about Zion? Do you know what that stands for? Jerusalem. The very city where they crucified Him is the city where God is going to crown Him: in Jerusalem. "Yet, in spite of all that man can do, I'm going to crown My king in Jerusalem."

Do you ever play checkers? You know the idea of checkers is that you just keep on moving the men against the opponent till you move your checker right into the king's row, and then you say, "Crown him"—"Crown him." That's what God is doing. God is just simply playing checkers with the kingdoms of this world. And, you see the kingdoms, they're just moving back and forth just like checkers on a checkerboard. But, God is getting ready to move His king into king's row to say, "Crown Him"—"Crown

Him.” *“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”*

Now, you see, folks, God set His heart on this. That’s when there’s going to be peace. There’s not going to be any peace until the Prince of Peace rules from Jerusalem. And, that’s the reason the Bible says that we are to pray for the Peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6).

Now, right now, dear friend, the world is torn in war. We are looking at the Battle of Armageddon. We’re facing the Great Tribulation that will come before the Battle of Armageddon. But, God has one purpose in mind. He’s going to set His king upon His holy hill of Zion, and all Hell can’t stop it.

III. The Voice of the Saving Son

Now, you’ve heard the sinful people speak. You’ve heard the sovereign God speak. Now, I want you to hear the saving Son as He speaks. Now, the Lord Jesus begins to speak. And, He speaks in Psalm 2, verse 7, and following. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says. Jesus said, *“I will declare the decree: the LORD”—that is, Jehovah—“hath said unto me, Thou art my Son...”*—I wish to God that all of our Jewish friends knew that the Old Testament speaks of the Son of God. I wish that they all knew that the Old Testament speaks of God’s only begotten Son. Jehovah says to Me—*“Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psalm 2:7–8).

Now, here’s what the Lord Jesus says. Here’s what the saving Son says. Listen to His voice.

A. His Divine Position

First of all, He speaks of His divine position. He says, “The Lord says to Me, You’re My Son.” Listen to me, friend. You’ll never settle the sin problem until you answer the Son question, until you know the Son of God. *You’ll never settle the sin question until you settle the Son question.*

Let me give you a verse to put in your margin right there—John 3, verses 35 and 36: *“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (John 3:35–36).

B. His Divine Purpose

And so, here the Son speaks of His divine position. And then, He speaks of His divine purpose, in Psalm 2, verse 8. Look at Psalm 2, verse 8. God the Father says to God the Son, *“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psalm 2:8).

Now, if you know anything about the Bible, you know the devil came to Jesus, and

the devil said, “If you worship me, I’ll give you the kingdoms of this world” (Matthew 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–7). But, Jesus knew Psalm 2. Jesus knew verse 8. Jesus knew that all He had to do was ask the Father, and the Father would give Him the heathen for His possession, for His inheritance, the uttermost part of the earth for His possession.

You see, dear friend, there is coming a time when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to rule and to reign. And, when He does, there will be peace on Earth. The prophet Isaiah said, “*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Isaiah 11:9). The Bible says that, “*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb*” (Isaiah 11:6). There’s coming a time when men “*shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks*” (Isaiah 2:4). We sing that,

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

—ISAAC WATTS

C. His Divine Power

But, not only does the Son speak of His position, in verse 7, and His purpose, in verse 8, but His power, in verse 9. Look in Psalm 2, verse 9: “*Thou...*”—God the Father is speaking to God the Son—“*Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel*” (Psalm 2:9). Jesus Christ came the first time, dear friend, to redeem. But, He’s coming the second time to reign. When He came the first time, they put a wilted reed in His hand. They crowned Him with thorns. They put a purple robe on His back, and they mocked Him, and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matthew 27:28–29; Mark 15:17–18; John 19:2–3). When He comes again, my dear friend, He’s coming with a diadem. And, in His hand there will not be a wilted reed. There will be a rod of iron that will not bend and will not break. He is coming in power and glory to rule and to reign, when God sets His king upon His holy hill of Zion, and all Hell can’t stop it.

IV. The Voice of the Seeking Spirit

The sinful people speak. The sovereign God speaks. The saving Son speaks. And now, my friend, the seeking Spirit speaks. See how this Psalm ends. After God the Father and God the Son speak, then God the Holy Spirit speaks.

A. A Word of Exhortation

Look in Psalm 2, verse 10. The Holy Spirit gives us what we call, first of all, a word of exhortation. Look at it. “*Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of*

the earth” (Psalm 2:10). You high muckety-mucks, you intellectuals, you philosophers, you governmental rulers, God the Holy Spirit says, “*Be wise*”—“*Be wise.*” My dear friend, here is a word of exhortation. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10).

I’m holding in my hand a book of wisdom that was written for this Christmas season. It was written for those of us who live at the end of the age, for those of us who are facing the Great Tribulation and Armageddon before God sets His king upon His holy hill of Zion. And, God the Holy Spirit says, “*Be wise*”—“*Be wise.*” Hear what God has to say.

B. A Word of Invitation

There’s a word of exhortation, and then there’s a word of invitation. Look in Psalm 2, verses 11 and 12: “*Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son*” (Psalm 2:11–12). What does he mean by that? Oh, my dear friend, this is the kiss of submission and the kiss of love. “*Kiss the Son.*” As Mary kissed His feet, anointed His feet with oil, wiped that oil away with the hairs of her head, and bowed in submission before the Son of God.

C. A Word of Admonition

“*Be wise*”: that’s the exhortation. “*Kiss the Son*”: that is the invitation. And then, finally, there’s an admonition. Look in Psalm 2, verse 12: “*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little*” (Psalm 2:12). Oh, my dear friend, He is a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath. He’s a God of mercy, but He’s also a God of judgment.

There’s a battle now going on between the mercy of God and the judgment of God. And, the raging waters of God’s wrath are furiously pounding against the dam of His mercy. One day the dam of God’s mercy will give way to the judgment waters of God’s wrath. What God is saying is this. Listen to me—listen. “*Be wise*”: that’s the exhortation. “*Kiss the Son*”: that’s the invitation. “*Lest...ye perish*”: that’s the admonition. Friend, if there was ever a Word of God for our generation this is the Word of God.

Listen finally to the last verse, the last part: “*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*” (Psalm 2:12). The Hebrew word *trust* here means, “refuge.” Blessed are all people who find their refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

When I was in seminary many years ago, I had a wonderful seminary president whose name was Dr. Roland Q. Leavell. He was an old man who had a gravelly voice, and a great preacher of the Word of God. He told me a story that embedded itself on my mind and on my consciousness. Dr. Leavell said that he was in a foreign country overseas,

and it was announced that a king of that country was going to come down the road in an open limousine and all of the subjects could see the king. He was going to ride right through the heart of that city. He asked people, "What would I have to do to see the king?" They said, "Well, there will be a great crowd there. You need to get up very early and find a place right there on the curb, and don't let anybody elbow you out of the way if you want to see the king." He said, "I'd never seen a real live king. I made up my mind I was going to see the king." He said, "I got up very early. I got my place right there on the curb, and people began to squeeze and to jostle, but I stood my place. I waited. It was a long wait. I waited and waited and waited. And, the crowds gathered, and the crowds gathered." He said, "After a while, I could hear the tumult. I could hear the noise. He was coming, and the people were cheering. And, they were saying, 'The king is coming! The king is coming! The king is coming!'" He said, "My heart began to beat and to flutter. I got ready. For the first time I was going to see a king. And," he said, "he drove by. And, I have never been so disappointed in my life. He was a man: a nose, ears, eyes, hair, and suit; a two-legged man. He went past—the king." He said, "I tried to analyze that. Why was I so disappointed? Why was I so let down? What was it? What happened?" And, he said, "When I got away, I understood the whole thing. You know why it didn't excite me? He wasn't my king." He said, "As a matter of fact, he didn't even know my name."

Friend, I want to tell you something. Our King is coming. Our King is coming. And, when He comes, He calls His sheep by their name. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, is coming. The Christ of Christmas is coming again. And, Jehovah God says, "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*" (Psalm 2:6). And, when He does, my friend, there will be peace on Earth. There will.

How to Be a Dynamite Dad

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 20, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 3:3

“But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.”

PSALMS 3:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Dynamite Dad Is an Encourager
 - A. Children Are Frightened
 - B. Children Are Sad
 - C. Children Are Angry
 - D. Children Are Confused
- II. A Dynamite Dad Is a Protector
 - A. Four Major Areas of Danger
 1. Liberalism in Religion
 2. Humanism in the Schools
 3. Hedonism in Society
 4. Materialism in the Home
- III. A Dynamite Dad Is a Counselor
- IV. A Dynamite Dad Is a Friend
 - A. Be Positive
 - B. Be Aware
 - C. Be Gentle
 - D. Be Transparent

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word, and turn with me, please, to Psalm 3, verse 3. Tonight, we’re talking on this subject: “How to be a Dynamite Daddy.” And, we could not have had a better song, because what Chris said when his earthly father went to Heaven 17 years ago—the Heavenly Father was there... And, indeed, God the Father is a Heavenly Father and a pattern for dads today, and that’s the reason I’m going to look in the Book of Psalms and find some attributes of the Heavenly Father and let them be used as guides and models for those of us who wish to be better dads.

Now, almost any body can be a father if they’re healthy and a male—that is, they can sire a child; they can impregnate a woman. Almost any body can be a father if

they're healthy and a male, but it takes somebody special to be a daddy, doesn't it? What we need in the world today are more daddies. To be a good man—that's hard. To be a good husband—that's difficult. But, to be a good man, a good husband, and a good dad—that's the hardest of all, but I think that's the very best of all.

Now, I don't want to put our dads, tonight, on a guilt trip. I'm not here to increase the pressure on you. There are already too many pressures on modern dads today, so I come not as a person to incriminate, or a person to scold, but I come as somebody who wants to help. I've done my tour as a dad—that is, raising children. And now, I'm a granddad, and I'm enjoying it in a wonderful, wonderful way. We have... As I look back upon my career raising children, I look back with a lot of joy, look back with some sadness, and some regret, and a lot of experience. And, I want to mingle that experience tonight with the Word of God and tell you what one man has learned about being a daddy and just talk to our dads tonight about how to be a dynamite dad.

I. A Dynamite Dad Is an Encourager

Now, look, if you will, in Psalm 3 and verse 3—Psalm 3 and verse 3: “*But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter...of [my] head*” (Psalm 3:3). The first thing I want to say about dynamite dads is that they ought to be an encourager. Children today need encouragement; they need somebody to lift up their heads. We're living in a day where not only the dads and the moms are stressed, but, believe it or not, the teenagers are stressed more than Mom and Dad. They've taken surveys of teenagers, and 68% of them—that's most of them by far—68% of them are pessimistic about the future. They have sincere, genuine doubts about the future. That is, they are filled with insecurity.

Did you know that each year in the United States of America—listen to this—6,000 teenagers die by suicide? Six thousand. Now, in 1950, suicide was the fifth leading cause of death among teenagers, but since 1980 it has been the second leading cause of death by teenagers. That's suicide. Every 78 seconds in America, a teenager attempts suicide—every 78 seconds. In preparing this message, I learned, if the statistics I've studied are correct (and I have no reason to believe that they're not), that 10% of all teenage boys in America have attempted suicide, and 18% of all teenage girls have attempted suicide. Why? Because they're living under unbelievable pressure, and they need encouragement. They're hopeless, and they're confused.

Now, why is this? Well, the days when father knew best, *Leave it to Beaver*, all of that—those days are gone. Today, both parents are working. Children come home to an empty house. Twelve million teenagers in America live with single parents in a single-parent home. They're having music that is being drilled into their heads constantly—rock music. The theme of rock music today is sex, drugs, despair, and suicide, and it is aimed primarily at teenagers.

Now, what are the teenagers feeling today?

A. Children Are Frightened

Many of them are frightened. You know, the thing that frightens teenagers more than anything else is that mom and dad are gonna get a divorce. Now, you may have never mentioned that you're gonna get a divorce or even talked about it, but when they hear you arguing about money, when they hear you arguing about the other things that people argue about in their homes, they wonder, "Is the same thing that has happened to most of my friends going to happen to me?" Many of them have friends whose parents have divorced, and they're frightened that their home is going to be divorced and they're going to have to choose between Dad and Mom.

B. Children Are Sad

Not only are they frightened, but they're sad. Many children today have had their youth taken away from them. They've been forced into an adult world, adult situations. And, while many of them tend to want to have fun and to party, if you'll just peel back the veneer, they are the walking sad, and they're lonely—very lonely. You can be lonely in a crowd, lonely in high school. Many of them are home alone, and television and Nintendo don't take the place of parents.

C. Children Are Angry

Many of them are angry—I mean, very angry. Some of them are angry because the home has been broken up. Many of them are angry at their brothers and sisters. Many of them are angry at people in school. Many of them are angry at having to call somebody else "Mom" or "Dad" that they feel are not Mom or Dad. Many of them are angry at what they feel is neglect and unfair discipline. When Josh McDowell was here, he said one of the finest things I've ever heard a man say (talking about raising children): he said, "Rules without a relationship equal rebellion"—"rules without a relationship equal rebellion." We have a generation of rebellious kids today because they've been given rules, but they've not found a relationship.

D. Children Are Confused

And, many of them are confused. They're being bombarded with messages from every side. They're being told, "Just say, 'No.'" They're being told, "Just do it." And, they're being told, "Wear a condom." What are they hearing? They are totally confused, and they need dads who will encourage them, who will lift up their heads; dads who will put their arms around them and show love; and dads who need to look the problem face-forward, to face the problem. Some of you dads need to take the day off, meet your child after school, pick up that child, look the child in the face, and say, "You know, dad hasn't been as available as he ought to be, but I love you with all of my heart. You, my

daughter, are precious to me. You, my son, are precious to me. And, I want you to know that I am here for you.”

A dynamite dad is an encourager. I don't know a better thing that you could do for your child than to simply lift up his head, lift up her head, and encourage.

II. A Dynamite Dad Is a Protector

Secondly, a dynamite dad is not only an encourager, but he is a protector. Look again in verse 3: *“But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me”* (Psalm 3:3). Look in Psalm chapter 4, verse 8: he says, *“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me [to] dwell in safety”* (Psalm 4:8). Look in Psalm chapter 5, verses 11 and 12: *“let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them”* (Psalm 5:11). Young people today need dads who are protectors.

I read a terrible thing in the newspaper today; maybe you read it—about that little boy down in Florida who was wading there, very near where I was born and raised, and an alligator in shallow water came up and dragged that little boy beneath the water and killed him. The dad was there. The dad tried to protect his son, to save his son, but there was the alligator that was there. And, I thought, “What a horrible thing—what a horrible thing—that must be, to be out on a picnic, a family outing, and to see your own flesh and blood devoured, or at least mangled, by some beast.”

Yet things perhaps worse than that are happening to boys and girls in this city all around us. There are so many dangers that are worse than any beast that might take physical life. It's unbelievable the diet that your teenagers are watching on television, especially through cable television. Now, if—I'm just going to say something, and I'm going to meddle here a little bit—but if you've got HBO and these other things, you ought to get it out of your house. That's Hell's Box Office—get it out. Children don't need to be exposed to prostitution, divorce, abortion, rape, and homosexuality—they're being fed a steady diet of that. There need to be some dads who will stand up and be a shield to their children.

Do you know what the two greatest drives for teenagers are? Number one, the drive to be accepted; number two, the sexual drive—the drive to be accepted; number two, the sexual drive. Now, you put those two together. When they want to be accepted, and when they have these hormones that are exploding, and then they're being fed a constant diet of filth, and they're being told that everybody is doing it, what's going to happen? Our schools have taken it upon themselves to say that they're going to sexually educate our children. I read something recently that truly shocked me: in Dartmouth College—I don't know whether this is still happening, but some years ago—when a student would matriculate in Dartmouth College, they were given a safe sex kit at registration. There, with the condoms; and there, with all of the paraphernalia; and

there, with an instruction book, when the kids registered for college, they are given a set of instructions as to how to fornicate safely. That's a part of the curriculum when you register. You say, "Well, they're going to do it, so we might as well protect them." That's like saying, "Children are gonna play with high-tension wires. We teach them how to wear rubber gloves."

A. Four Major Areas of Danger

There are four major areas of danger where the dad needs to be a shield:

1. Liberalism in Religion

Area number one: liberalism in religion. I'll tell you, there are two things that would make me very, very angry. There are more than that, but here's two very high on my list: one is any man who would violate the purity of one of my daughters—there's something in me that would rise up in great anger; the other is any man who would tamper with my child's faith and destroy their belief in this book. Oh, how that would make me angry—to send them off to some so-called "Baptist" school or any other university and have someone take advantage of the plastic mentality of youth. One of the things that dads need to shield their children over is liberalism in religion.

2. Humanism in the Schools

And then, humanism in the schools. Children are being taught that they are an accident—that they just happened. We cannot teach creationism, but we are forced to send our children to school and pay the bills to have them systematically seduced away from their faith.

3. Hedonism in Society

Liberalism in the churches, humanism in the schools, hedonism in society. The beer barons are after your kids. And, by the way, they have won: they've won the battle—they have won the battle. Thirty-two gallons of beer per capita is sold in the United States. That is 32 gallons of beer for every man, woman, boy, and girl from cradle to the grave sold here in the United States of America. Ninety-five percent of college students drink beer. They say, "Beer belongs." I saw an ad the other day where one of these beer companies—and I'll not sully my mouth by mentioning the name—said, "We need to teach your little children how to drink responsibly." Isn't that sweet of them? They want to teach our children how to drink responsibly, and they want to be our aid; they want to help us. Oh, that just gives me pains I can't locate! Sometimes I do. One out of every 15 persons who begins to drink will become an alcoholic. One out of every 15 will become a part of the walking dead. And, nobody says, "I'm going to be an alcoholic," when they begin to drink. Everybody drinks for sociability, and acceptability, and fun before they become that part of the army of the walking dead.

Liberalism in the church, humanism in the schools, hedonism in society. Rock music

is being drummed into the heads of teenagers. Again, I want to tell you that the theme of rock music and heavy metal is promiscuity, bisexuality, homosexuality, fatalism, drugs, alcohol, and rebellion.

4. Materialism in the Home

The fourth danger is materialism in the home. We think that things will make us happy. I'll say more about that later on, but I'm saying this, Dad: that you have a duty and a responsibility, number one, to be to your child an encourager, a lifter of his head; and number two, you have a duty and a responsibility to be a shield, a protector. Your children need you to protect them as much as that dad was needed to protect his son against that alligator, had he been able to do so.

III. A Dynamite Dad Is a Counselor

The third thing I want to say about a dynamite dad—a dynamite dad is a counselor. A dynamite dad is one who is able to teach his children what is right and what is wrong. Psalm chapter 12 and verse 6: *“The words of the LORD are pure...as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”* (Psalm 12:6). The kids don't know, and where are they going to learn? “Well,” you say, “Pastor Rogers, we send them to Sunday School.” Well I'm glad you do—and you should. But, do you think that Sunday School is the answer to the spiritual training of your children? If you believe that, you've got rooms to rent upstairs—unfurnished.

How many weeks a year is the average child in Sunday School? Let's be generous, Brother Paul, and say that he's here 40 weeks out of 52. I wish that the average child were here 40 weeks out of 52, but let's just say he is here 40 weeks out of 52. And then, let's say that when he comes to Sunday School here, after they take the records, after they plan the parties, after they talk and have their social fellowship, that the teacher opens the Bible and begins to teach the Bible. So, out of the hour that he's in Sunday School, let's say there's half an hour of Bible teaching. Well, friend, that's 20 solid hours a year he's getting... Many times he's getting that a teacher who really doesn't know how to teach and really doesn't know what he's teaching. I believe that the Sunday School at Bellevue is better than the average. But, if you think, dear friend, that that is where your children are going to get their spiritual education, you are so wrong. Did you know that the average preschooler spends more time watching television than a university student in classroom earning a bachelor's degree? The child in Sunday School will get twenty hours a year. The average preschooler watches television 20 hours a week.

And, what's on television? There's a lot there besides Big Bird. Did you know that a child from the 7th to the 12th grade listens to 10,500 hours of rock music—the average? Some listen to more than that. And, by the way, 32 gallons of beer per capita—

somebody drank some of mine; somebody drank 64, because I didn't drink any. The average—10,500 hours drummed into their head: free love, sex, rebellion. And, how the media distorts the whole thing! They don't know anything about love as God planned it. And, the kids who listen, and they watch MTV and these other things—their whole reality is distorted; their frame of reference is distorted. They don't know. They have such a feeling of inadequacy, such a feeling of inferiority.

The girls think that, you know, "If I'm going to be accepted, I've got to look like these girls on television—have faces like angels and morals like alley cats. I'm gonna be valued for the shape of my body, the size of my bosom, how tightly the jeans fit. And, that takes all of this for me to be accepted. My hair has to be right. My body has to be right. My clothes have to be right. My style has to be right." And, about the time you get it all figured out, somebody changes it. Isn't that right? I watch the kids today—the way they wear their hair today. Funny, isn't it? All right now. But, if you don't wear your hair that way today, you're going to be out.

Dynamite dads are dads who will learn how to step in and be a counselor, who will say, "Listen, here's the truth. Child, think through this thing. Sit down and think with Dad." These kids want somebody to tell them. They want a dad who knows and who cares enough.

IV. A Dynamite Dad Is a Friend

Last of all, a dynamite dad is a friend—a friend. Look, if you will, in Psalm 4 and verses—and I could've picked out so many. I just picked these out at random—Psalm 4, verses 3 through 8: "*But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself*"—I love that. God says, "I want you for Myself"—"*the LORD will hear when I call [upon] him*"—that means, "He is near to me"—"*Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still... Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD. There be many who say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than [at] the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me [to] dwell in safety*" (Psalm 4:3–8). What I just read to you is the description of a Heavenly Father who is a great friend. That's what your child needs—is a friend.

Do you know that a great, great, great, great deal of the problems in America today are caused by the absentee father? In the research that I did, I found that the absence of a father is far greater—a far greater—contribution to juvenile delinquency than poverty. Now, the social engineers will tell us that if we want to eliminate delinquency, that what we have to do is to have a war against poverty. And, I really believe that we ought to do all that we can do to undo poverty. But, there is a greater cause to juvenile

delinquency than poverty, and it is the absentee father.

Thirty-nine girls had anorexia. They surveyed these 39 girls to find out if there was one common thread, one thing that was common among all these anorexic girls. And, they found out that 36 of the 39 had no close relationship with a father. John Hopkins University did some research, and Johns Hopkins University—not some Baptist preacher—said that young white teenage girls in fatherless families are 60% more likely to have premarital intercourse than girls with fathers—60% more likely to have premarital intercourse than girls in homes with fathers. Promiscuity is much more likely in a fatherless home. Children need fathers who are friends.

Want to be a friend to your children? Let me just mention five things very quickly here.

A. Be Positive

Be positive; don't be a negative parent. Suppose every time you want to talk to me—Sonny or Brother Bob, every time you came up to me—you opened your mouth, and I slapped you. I'd slap Bob; I wouldn't slap Sonny. I don't mess with Sonny. Suppose every time one of these men opened their mouth I slapped them. Well, I think something would have to give in a relationship like that. I mean, they'd say, "Look, if we can't talk with this man, there's something wrong." "Well," you say, "I don't"—"I don't"—"slap my children every time they open their mouth." No, but sometimes verbal slaps are as vicious as your hands.

When you're negative to your children every time they open their mouth... Some kids are 15 before they learn their names aren't Johnny Don't. Negativism, belittling. Learn to be positive; learn to listen. When I talk to teenagers, young people, one thing they almost always say is, "My parents will not listen to me." Now, you say, "Oh, I do listen." You listen for about five minutes before you begin to lecture. You do not listen. They do not feel that they can talk to you. Be positive.

B. Be Aware

Be aware. Listen. Think of life from their point of view. Put yourself in their set of circumstances. Feel what they're feeling. They want to know that you care enough to understand.

C. Be Gentle

And, be gentle. If I had it to do over again, I'd be a whole lot more gentle. One of the things that we need to learn to do is hug more, and touch more, and be more tender. When the Apostle Paul was talking to the church at Thessalonica, he said there in 1 Thessalonians 2, in verse 7, he said, "I was like a gentle nurse among you"—"like a nurse" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). Now, here's Paul. Paul was a man, but Paul said, "I was

like a nurse to you.” When you talk to your children, touch them; put your hand on them. I don’t care how big your big old boys are—give them a hug. And, even if they seem to draw back, hug them anyway. They really want you to. They don’t know how to react to that, but you need to touch and be gentle. You can speak not only with your voice, but with non-verbal language.

D. Be Transparent

And, be transparent. Be a transparent parent, where they know you—they they know there’s no phoniness. I don’t mean you have to spill your guts and tell them every fault, and fear, and failure, and foible that you have. But, when you’re hurt, let them know it. When you’re happy, let them know it. When you fail, admit it. They already know it, but when you admit it, when you say, “I don’t know,” maybe they’ll think you do know when you do know. And, when you do something wrong and admit it, maybe then they’ll begin to give you credit for what you do that is right. And, be available to all of these. Kids need somebody who is a friend.

Now, I’m almost finished, but let me say this, friend: if you are an absentee father, here’s what’s going to happen to your daughter: your daughter who does not feel that you have accepted her is going to feel rejected—rejection—and she’s going to feel that there’s something wrong with her femininity. After all, if she could not attract her own father, who would be attracted to her? So, she’s going to crave attention; she’s going to look for somebody to hug her and love her. And, some boy will be glad to do that in order to get the other pleasures that he wants. And, if she feels that she has not been loved by her father, she’s going to be an individual who has innate feelings of rejection, and the slightest inconsistency of her husband or friends is going to cause her to go through life with a feeling of rejection. She’s going to have difficulty really believing that she could be loved. She’s going to find older men more attractive to her than younger men, because she’s going to be looking for somebody who will be a father figure to her. But, if she marries one of these older men, she’ll find it difficult giving herself to that man, because she’ll find it kind of hard to (quote) “sleep with dad” (end of quote). And, she’s going to find it very difficult to trust God, because we get our idea of God from our dads.

And, what about a boy? A boy who doesn’t have a close relationship with his dad—you know what he’s going to turn out to be? Many times he’s going to be one of these macho men. You know why he’s a macho man? It’s really just a guise of insecurity. He’s not going to be able to identify with other men, so he’s got a shell around him. And, he may look to his mama as the role model. And, if he’s not a macho man, he may turn out to be a wimp and not have the masculinity that he ought to have. And, this lack of masculinity can lead to homosexual attraction, and interaction, and vulnerability—not

always, but sometimes, and that's not the only cause. Your boy, your girl, will mistake sex for love and also go into rejection syndrome. I'm telling you, folks, that boys and girls need dads who are friends.

Conclusion

I close with this. One dad said this: "my family is all grown; the kids are all gone. But, if I had it to do all over again, this is what I would do: number one, I would love my wife more in front of my children; number two, I would laugh with my children more—I would laugh at our mistakes and our joys; number three, I would listen more, even to the youngest child; number four, I would be more honest about my own weaknesses and stop pretending perfection; number five, I would pray differently for my family—instead of focusing on them, I would focus more on me. Rather than asking God to change them, I would pray more and more asking God to change me. Next, I would do more things with my children. Next, I would do more encouraging and bestow more praise. Next, I would pay more attention to little things—deeds and words of love and kindness. Finally, if I had it to do all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family. I would use every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day to point them to God." You know who said that? The great Bible teacher John MacArthur. That's what he said he would do. And, when I read that, I said, "Amen. That's what I'd do if I could do it all over again."

Father, seal the message to our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What Is Man?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 3, 1979

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 8:1–9

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

PSALMS 8:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. Man Is Crowned with Glory
 - A. In His Design
 - B. In His Dignity
 - C. In His Dominion
- II. Man Is Charged with Guilt
- III. Man May Be Changed by Grace
 - A. Jesus Suffered as a Man
 - B. Jesus Subdued as a Man
 - C. Jesus Sympathizes as a Man

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles, please, and turn again to Psalm 8. This psalm, of course, was put to music for us today and prepared our hearts for the preaching of the Word of God—Psalm 8. Today, we’re thinking on this subject: “What is Man?”

I want you to picture little David out on a lonely vigil keeping his sheep. One night, he feels so alone, and he looks up into the heavens. And there he sees the stars like a chandelier, and there he sees the luster of the moon. And he meditates on the far reaches and the vastness of space, and he thinks about the greatness of the God who made it all. And he says, *“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens? Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.”* Then David says, *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his*

feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Psalms 8:1–9)

And now, turn, please, to Hebrews chapter 2, and I want you to see the New Testament interpretation and the New Testament application of Psalm 8. And I'm reading now in Hebrews chapter 2, and I begin my reading in verse 5. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 2, verse 5, *“For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified,”*—now he's talking about David a long time ago—*“saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.”* (Hebrews 2:5–8)

“What is man...?” David looks up there at those stars. David looks at the vastness of all that, and David says, *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?”* (Psalms 8:3–4) David thinks of the omnipotence of God—that God that flung out the stars, that hung up the moon, that scooped out the seas, that heaped up the mountains, that set His glory above it all. Then David looks at himself, and he felt so small, so insignificant. I was reading the other day in a secular journal some while back where a scientist was telling us that in our universe there are twelve octillion suns like our sun. Now, how many is that? He said, “Well, to help you to understand, there are more stars in our known universe than there are grains of sand on all the seashores of all of the earth.” And David realizes this.

And then David thinks how that the stars look like they've been there forever and will be there forever, and David knows that very soon he's going to pass on, for the Bible describes man as being so temporary. The Bible describes our life as a tale that is told like a flower that fades, like the grass that withers, like the smoke that dissipates, like the vapor that is burned off with the morning sun. And David just feels so temporary and so small, and God seems so great and so big. And so David asks the question, *“What is man, that thou art mindful of him...?”* (Psalms 8:4)

Incidentally, when our Apollo astronauts went to the moon, they left Psalm 8 in a sealed capsule, Dr. Lane. It's up there right now on the moon. Now, little David never thought that his words would be in a sealed capsule up on that moon when he said, *“When I consider the moon, the work of thy fingers...”* (Psalms 8:3) He never thought those words would be written down and put in a sealed capsule and transported by an astronaut to the moon. David thinks of himself as just something passing, something so

temporary, in one sense of the word.

Somebody has described the life of man, first of all, as the teachable teens; then, the tender twenties; and then, the tireless thirties; and then, the fiery forties; and then, the forceful fifties, the serious sixties, the sacred seventies, the aching eighties, the nagging nineties, shortening breath, death, the sod, God—that's the history of man. Oh, we move through it so fast! And all of us are going from one stage to another right on until one day we too will be underneath that sod, and I pray God that it will not be without Him. As someone said, "Don't get out on a limb without Him." Oh, dear friend, do you know Him? Man seems so insignificant and so small. Now, David, in the light of the vastness of the universe and the smallness and the seeming insignificance of man, asks this question: "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (Psalms 8:4)

Now, some people have an underestimation of man. They think of man as just some blob of protoplasm, some sort of an insect here upon the earth, just another animal—a little more complex. H. G. Wells said, "Man is an inhabitant on a thin rind on a negligible detached blob of matter belonging to one of the millions of stars, one among millions of island universes." Well, if you talk about man that way, it makes him seem mighty insignificant, and that's the view some people have: they underestimate man.

And then, other people overestimate man. They almost deify man. They make man as the sum total of everything. And man seems at the shrine of his computers to worship himself. And you can almost hear some people standing with their chest stuck out, saying, "Our brothers, which art on earth, hallowed be our name. Our kingdom come; our will be done on earth..." And you think man is worshipping himself, and that's a wrong view of man, too—this inflated, egotistical, pompous view of man.

In between is the Bible view. And we're going to see here in Hebrews chapter 2 what the Bible says man is, and we're going to think around three words: The first word is *glory*. The second word is *guilt*. And the third word is *grace*. And you're going to see those here in Hebrews chapter 2, and there you're going to have a record of what man is and an answer to little David's question so long ago: "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (Psalms 8:4)

I. Man Is Crowned with Glory

The first thing I want you to notice about man is that man was crowned with glory. Look here in Hebrews chapter 2, beginning in verse 6: "*But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour.*" Just underscore that: "*Thou crownedst him with glory and honour.*" (Hebrews 2:6–7) So, point number one is this: Man was crowned with glory. And how was man crowned with glory?

A. In His Design

Well, number one, by his design. Did you notice verse 7? *“Thou madest him...”* (Hebrews 2:7) Man didn’t just happen. Man didn’t just come up out of the primordial ooze. Man didn’t evolve. Man wasn’t once an amoeba. Man is not just a chance. Man is created. And when God created man, God said something about man that He didn’t say about anything else that He created in Genesis chapter 1, verse 26: *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:26) Man is made in the image of God. God didn’t say that about the rocks and the hills and the birds and the bees and the trees and the fleas. He didn’t say that about those things; He said that about man. *“Let us make man in our image.”* There’s something different about man: Man is in the image of God.

Now, scientists today think they’re so very clever. As a matter of fact, they have a boast that one of these days they are going to go into the laboratory and create life. And when they move into the laboratory and create life, then they’ll say that will do away with the need for God and the idea of God.

Just suppose my father is a master architect and a tremendous builder, and let’s suppose that my father builds a glorious, beautiful palace—a mansion. He takes the very best of materials. He takes his knowhow, and he takes his tools, and he builds a beautiful mansion. And then, let’s suppose that I study what my father does, and I watch very carefully every move that my father makes. And then I take my father’s materials, I take my father’s plans, I take my father’s tools, and I build a lopsided chicken coop; and when I’m finished, I point to that chicken coop, and I say, “You see that? That proves my father doesn’t exist.” That would be silly, wouldn’t it?

Oh, when a man goes into a laboratory, and he takes God’s methods, and God’s materials, and God’s tools, and God’s knowhow, with a mind that God Himself has given to that man, and he builds some lifelike substance, how absurd—how foolish—for him to say there is no God! No, you see, man is made by God. *“Thou madest him...”* (Hebrews 2:7) And so we see the glory of man, first of all, is in his design. He is in the image of God.

B. In His Dignity

But not only do we see the glory of man in his design; we also see the glory of man in his dignity, because not only did God design man; God also desires man. This is what, just to use the vernacular, blew the mind of David. He says, *“What is man,”*—this is verse 6—*“that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?”* (Hebrews 2:6)

Why should this great God be interested in me or you? Why would President Carter be interested in an ant in Shelby Forest? Why, that’s not nearly as absurd as to say that

God is personally interested in us, when you consider the vastness of the universe: why? And suppose President Carter were to write you a letter, or have his secretary to call you this afternoon when you get home and say, “Hello. This is the White House calling. Tommy Lane, it’s President Carter. I want to come to your house and spend a few days with you.” Now I don’t know about Dr. Lane’s politics, but I’ll tell you this: We’d never get finished hearing him tell about the time that the President of the United States called him up and wanted to come and visit with him. This is what David can’t understand: “God, you’re mindful of me. You visit with me.”

And God has always been the great God of the universe, mindful of man and visiting with man. He visited with Abraham. He visited with Isaac. He visited with Jacob. He visited with Samson. He visited with Paul. He visited with us all in the Lord Jesus Christ, who left heaven above and came to this earth. And David just is overwhelmed not only at man’s design—“*thou madest him*” (Hebrews 2:7)—but at man’s dignity—“*thou art mindful of him.*” (Hebrews 2:6) Oh, friend, why does He do that? Listen to me, dear friend: *He doesn’t love us because we’re valuable; we’re valuable because He loves us.* He just, by His grace, has set His affection on us. And so there’s another thing that tells us of the dignity of man.

C. In His Dominion

But not only man’s design, and man’s dignity, but also man’s dominion speaks of his glory. Look, if you will, in verses 7 and 8 again: “*Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:*”—when God created it all, then God created, finally, Adam and Eve. And then God said to Adam and Eve, “You are to have dominion. You are to be king on this earth. You are to rule everything.” (Genesis 1:27–30) And the Bible says there was nothing that God did not put man over—“*thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.*” (Hebrews 2:7–8) And the Bible says that there is nothing—that “*he left nothing that is not put under him*” in verse 8. (Hebrews 2:8) Everything is under man.

Man is meant to rule. But man isn’t ruling today. I’ll guarantee you, rather than being in dominion, man is in slavery today. But that isn’t what God planned. When God made man, God made man with a beautiful design. God made man with a glorious dignity, and God gave to man this marvelous dominion. Man is supposed to rule. And so that’s point number one in the history of man; it’s what we call the glory of man: man was crowned with glory.

II. Man Is Charged with Guilt

But now, the second thing I want you to see is this: Man is charged with guilt. Look, if you will, in verse 8. Notice the word *but* when it comes along. Notice what he says:

“Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.” There’s nothing that man is not supposed to rule over. *“But now...”*—I want you to notice this—*“But now we see not yet all things put under him.”* (Hebrews 2:8) Just put a circle around that word *but*. It just seems to ruin it all. Everything is to be under our feet, but now we don’t see everything beneath our feet. What happened? Man forfeited his dominion. Man lost his rule. Man blew it, so to speak. He was charged with guilt.

You see, when God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image. Why? So He could have fellowship with them. I can’t have fellowship with this microphone. I can’t have fellowship with this watch, or even with those flowers. I can enjoy the flowers, but I can’t have fellowship with them. Now I can have fellowship with Dr. Hurt here, or with Tommy Lane, because we’re on the same wavelength. We are alike; we belong to flesh and blood. And so, when God made us, God made us in His image—not in His fleshly image, for He has no fleshly image, but in His spiritual image. God said something about man that He didn’t say about any of the rest of His creation: *“In the image of God created he [them]; male and female.”* (Genesis 1:27) Why? So that He could have fellowship with us. And in order for God to make us like Him, God had to give us a choice.

Now, listen. You cannot choose to be loyal unless you can choose to be disloyal. You cannot choose to love God unless there was the opportunity not to love God. And that’s why God took the risk and God gave us the choice: because, you see, what good is it being a God of love if there’s no one to love? And since God wants to love us, He wants to love someone like Him, someone who can choose to love Him. And that’s why God didn’t make us robots.

Suppose one of my children didn’t love me. Let’s suppose my daughter Janice didn’t love me—she does love me very much, but let’s suppose that she didn’t; I know she does, but let’s suppose that she didn’t—and I were to get her and set her down, and I studied the art of hypnotism, and I say, “Now, Janice”—I’ve studied hypnotism now, and I say—“Janice, you love Daddy. You love Daddy. You love Daddy.” And after a while, she says, “I love you, Daddy.” Now, what good is that to me—that I have hypnotized her, that I have forced her to love me? That doesn’t supply any need in my heart. I want her to love me because she chooses to love me.

And God wants you to love Him because you choose to love Him. And that’s the reason God created man in His own image and God gave to man a choice. But man made the wrong choice, and man sinned. And not only was man crowned with glory; now man is charged with guilt, and that image of God is defaced and marred.

I hear people talking today about mankind being in the image of God—that we’re in the image of God. Not now, we’re not! We were. Adam was in the image of God, but the

Bible says that Adam brought forth a son after his likeness and in his image. (Genesis 5:3) We are now not in the image of God, per se, but we are in the image of Adam. And that image has been marred and defaced. You don't think God is in this bad a shape, do you? No, dear friend. We're not now in the image of God; we are in the image of Adam. And because of that, rather than being a little lower than the angels, we're a little lower than the animals.

I mean, man does things today with his super intelligence that no animal could do. You see, man's problem is that his mental horsepower has outrun his moral brakes, and he has the ability to do things that no self-respecting animal would do.

I heard about a couple of monkeys sitting up in a coconut tree discussing evolution, and they were discussing us and all of the mean things that human beings do. And one of those monkeys said to another monkey, "Man descended, the ornery cuss; but, brother, he didn't descend from us." And I can just sympathize with the monkey: he didn't want that blamed on him.

Or I heard about some hogs that were in the hog pen, and one of them went off and got drunk. And he came back to the hog pen, and the other hogs wouldn't let him in. And finally he just apologized, and he said to the hogs on the inside of the hog pen, "Please, if you'll just let me back in the hog pen one more time, I'll promise never to act like a human being again." So, they let him back in.

Now, man is meant to be a little lower than the angels. He becomes a little lower than the animals, because he is spiritually depraved. He is separated from God. He is now charged with guilt. Oh, he has great ability. He makes airplanes. But what does he do with them? He turns them into bombers. He discovers atomic energy. But what does he do with it? He makes a bomb out of it. He discovers television. And what does he do with it? He puts filth and violence on it. You see, man has ability, but he is depraved. And not only is his design marred; but, therefore, his dignity is marred. No longer can God have fellowship with him; no longer can God walk with him, because sin has separated between him and God. And he's lost his dominion. Man was meant to rule, but he doesn't rule.

Do you remember there in Psalm 8, verses 6 through 8, where the Bible describes all that we're supposed to rule over? Let me read it to you. Here's what God made you to do. Listen: "*Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*" (Psalms 8:6–8) Now, if you were what you ought to be, you would have dominion over the beasts, you would have dominion over the fowls, and you would dominion over the fish.

Jesus did. Do you remember when Jesus was going into Jerusalem on the day of

His triumphal entry into Jerusalem? He said to His disciples, “I want you to get a donkey whereon never a man sat before—a wild Syrian colt.” (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30) And Jesus rode that donkey unbroken into the city of Jerusalem. I’d like to see you do it. Jesus did—an unbroken colt. He rode him right into the city of Jerusalem. He had dominion over the beasts of the field.

What about the fowls of the air? Do you remember when Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Before the cock crows, you’ll deny me thrice”? (Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34) Notice the timing. One time Peter denied Jesus—no crowing. Second time Jesus was denied—no crowing. Third time—crowing. It’s amazing—amazing! Right on time. Jesus had dominion over the fowls of the air.

Do you remember the time when Jesus needed to pay His taxes? And what did Jesus tell Peter to do? He said, “Go cast a hook into the sea. You’ll catch a fish. Open its mouth and look in it. There will be a coin.” (Matthew 17:27) Now, friend, look, I don’t even catch fish, much less fish with coins in their mouths. How was our Lord able to guide that fish in the bottom of that sea so he goes along and scoops up that shiny coin that fell out of some fisherman’s pocket and brings it and delivers it to our Lord to pay His taxes with?

Jesus had dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowls of the air, over the beasts of the field; but we don’t have dominion. Man lost his design. That was marred. Man lost his dignity. That was defaced. Man lost his dominion.

III. Man May Be Changed by Grace

So, you see, chapter 2 is that man is charged with guilt. He was crowned with glory—that’s number one. Number two: He is charged with guilt. Now, number three—number three: He may be changed by grace. I want you to look in verse 9 now—Hebrews 2, verse 9. The first *but* we see is in verse 8: “*But now we see not yet all things put under him.*” There’s a *but* there, but I want you to see the *but* that’s in verse 9: “*But we see Jesus...*”—amen? Amen. Oh, listen, folks. If you don’t see Jesus, this sermon is no good today. If you didn’t see Jesus, that singing was no better than a bumblebee in a bottle. If you didn’t see Jesus, if you don’t come to church and see Jesus, you’ve missed it all—you missed it all! That’s what it’s all about. You see, man was crowned with glory; man is charged with guilt, but man may be changed by grace. Now, read this—“*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*” (Hebrews 2:8–9) Underscore the word *grace*: “*that he by the grace of God*”—“*the grace of God...*” Man may be changed—hallelujah!—by grace.

A dear little old lady sitting in a church one time heard her pastor preach on the sinfulness of man. It was hard for her to believe that mankind was sinful. And he just

took the Bible, and verse after verse he showed the total depravity of man. It finally dawned on her, and the sweet little old thing said, “Well, if we’re all that bad, then God help us!” Amen? That’s exactly right—that’s exactly right! That’s what I’m trying to say—is that we are charged with guilt, and may God help us!

Grace—*G-R-A-C-E: God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense*—that’s what grace is. Oh, man can be changed by grace. You see, the first man ruined us, and so God sent another man to redeem us. And you need to understand that it was in human flesh that sin came into the world, and therefore it has to be in human flesh that sin is removed from the world.

Let me show you what I’m talking about. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 for a moment. Just keep one hand where you are in Hebrews 2, but look in 1 Corinthians 15. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:21, “*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.*” Do you see it? Look in verse 22: “*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*” (1 Corinthians 15:21–22) Man knows he’s supposed to have dominion, and he’s always trying to reclaim that dominion by electricity, by fire, by wit, by wisdom. And many times he thinks he has reclaimed his dominion. He says, “Look what we’ve done! Look at our jet airplanes!” Yeah, he makes a jet airplane, and when he gets out of it, a hornet chases him all the way to the hanger. You see, man doesn’t have dominion. The only way man is going to get dominion, dear friend, is for the Lord Jesus Christ to get it for him. The first Adam ruined us; the second Adam, the Lord Jesus, redeems us. And, “*since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.*”

And this passage in Psalm 8 and in Hebrews 2 gives us the reason and the philosophy behind the fact that God became a man. Have you ever wondered why God didn’t just reach down from heaven and just say, “I’ll save you, and I’ll forgive you”? Why did Jesus have to come to this earth? Why did He have to take upon Him flesh and blood? Why? I’ll tell you why. Well, let’s let the writer of Hebrews tell us why. Three reasons—three reasons—so that we could be changed by the grace of God.

A. Jesus Suffered as a Man

Number one: Since it was as man we lost our salvation, as man we sinned, it is also as man that Jesus suffered. Look in verses 9 and 10: “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.*” (Hebrews 2:9) Why did Jesus become a man? So He could suffer. You see, sin causes suffering. You mark it down, and you mark it down well: Sin causes suffering. There is no way that God can let sin go unpunished. God never has, God never will, let sin go unpunished. And when God forgives sin, He doesn’t just overlook it. Sin causes suffering. If you are bound to sin, you’re bound to suffer. You listen to me: *Your sin will be pardoned in Christ, or it will*

be punished in hell; but it will not be overlooked. Sin causes suffering. And in order for Jesus Christ to remove that suffering from us, Jesus Christ had to take that suffering upon Himself, and God could not stay in heaven and suffer for our sins. In order for God to suffer for our sins, in order for Him to become our substitute, He had to be made a little lower than the angels Himself; He had to take upon Him human flesh. And Jesus suffered in agony and blood as a human being upon that cross, and He came from the throne of the universe to a stable and was hung on a wooden cross. And His sufferings were real. He suffered as a man because that's what the penalty for sin is.

B. Jesus Subdued as a Man

Now, listen. Not only as a man did He suffer, but as a man He subdued. Look in verses 14 and 15—again, the writer of Hebrews tells us why He became a man: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,”*—that's us—*“he also himself”*—that's Jesus—*“likewise took part of the same;”*—that is, Jesus became flesh and blood. Why?—*“that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;”*—you see, *“the wages of sin is death.”* (Romans 6:23) And if Jesus is going to take my punishment, He had to die, and the only way He could die was to become a man. But let me tell you, in His death, He destroyed the devil; He conquered the devil. And the Bible tells us that through His death on the cross He delivered us. Notice verse 15: and it is through His death that He—*“[delivered] them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”* (Hebrews 2:14–15) But no longer do we have to be in bondage to death, because Jesus, as a man, suffered, and Jesus, as a man, subdued Satan.

C. Jesus Sympathizes as a Man

But one other thing I want you to see: because Jesus suffered, and because Jesus subdued, Jesus now sympathizes. Read the last two verses: *“Wherefore...”*—here's another reason He became a man—*“wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest”*—hallelujah!—*“in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”* (Hebrews 2:17–18) Do you know what that means? It means, friends, He understands; He knows. Oh, He's able—He's able—not only to suffer and to subdue, but to sympathize. He was made a little lower than the angels that He might understand what we're going through.

Dr. Pollard, our faithful Pastor Emeritus, is here, and he can bear me out in this—that as a pastor so many times you go into situations that are so grievous you just don't understand how people can get themselves into situations like that: there seems to be no way out, and you have to be careful what you say when you're counseling with

people in a situation like that. Or, sometimes you go to hearts that are touched with grief; you go into a home where a precious little baby has just died and has been taken away from that mother's bosom. Or, you go to a funeral service where there's been a husband and a wife who've lived together for fifty years and then suddenly one is taken. Or, you go to someone who's suffering just such deep grief. And, friend, let me tell you, if you ever go into that kind of a situation, let me tell you one thing not to do. Are you ready? Don't put your arm around that person and say, "It's all right. I understand how you feel," because, friend, that's a lie: you don't understand. I tell you, nobody understands. And when you say, "I understand," there's something in those people that just rises up and says, "No, you don't. You don't know how I feel. You don't know how I hurt. You don't know. You don't understand. Nobody understands."

There's One who does. He understands. He knows, and He cares. He's not some phantom Savior; He's not some academic Savior. He lived among us. Oh, my friend, He feels what you feel; He knows what you know, and "*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are.*" (Hebrews 4:15) And therefore the Bible teaches us that He's able to sympathize. Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad for such a Savior? That's what makes it, friend: "*Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.*" (1 Timothy 3:16)

Listen. Man was crowned with glory. But then, man was charged with guilt. But now, man may be changed by grace. Jesus in the flesh suffered because of the grace of God for us. And let me tell you something wonderful. We think of what Adam lost over here—the first man. And then we think of what Jesus gained over here—the second man. But learn this: We gained far more in Christ than we ever lost in Adam. Do you understand that? We gained far more in Christ than we ever lost in Adam. I had rather be a saved sinner than an innocent angel who had never sinned. What a wonderful salvation we have!

And the best is yet to come. Do you remember that verse that says, "*We see not yet all things put under him*"? (Hebrews 2:8) Did you know that we're going to reign with Christ? Did you know that we who are made a little lower than the angels are going to judge angels, the Bible tells us? (1 Corinthians 6:3) Did you know that we're going to rule universes? Did you know that the Bible says, "*If we suffer [with Him], we shall also reign with him*"? (2 Timothy 2:12) Did you know that the Bible says God "*hath put all things under his feet,*" (1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22) and, one day, the Bible says to the Church that "*the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet*"? (Romans 16:20) Friend, we're made to rule; we're made to reign. Jesus said, "*I am the first and the last.*" (Revelation 1:17) That means Jesus was here before anything that we fear was ever here, and He'll be here after anything that we fear has passed away.

He was here before there was anything to fear; He'll be here after all things that we fear have passed away. What a Savior! How wonderful to know the Lord Jesus!

Conclusion

How does a man receive the grace of God? How is a man changed by the grace of God? Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith”—“through faith.”* (Ephesians 2:8) Jesus died for us. God left heaven and He became a man. The great God of the universe, the Infinite, became an infant and was made a little lower than the angels. But how does that become real to you? By faith. The Bible says, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”* (Acts 16:31) And I want to tell you today that if you will by faith believe that Christ died for your sins, if you will open your heart and ask Him in, He'll do three things: He will forgive your sin; He'll come into your heart and give you a new nature; and one day with Him all things will be put under your feet. He'll give you back that design that He had for you; He'll give you back that dignity that He made you for; and you'll have dominion with our Lord through all eternity. If I could do it for you, I would. If I could pray and ask Christ into your heart for you, I would. But I cannot. I've preached as best I know how, and I want to ask you now, today, to open your heart and your life to Jesus Christ.

How Long, Lord?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 1, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 13

*“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever?
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?”*

PSALMS 13:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. There Was a Persistent Problem
 - A. He Felt Forgotten
 - B. He Felt Forsaken
 - C. He Felt Frustrated
- II. There Was a Prevailing Prayer
- III. There Was a Proper Perspective
 - A. Unshakeable Faith
 - B. Unspeakable Joy
 - C. Unquenchable Praise

Conclusion

Introduction

I want to ask you a question: Has there ever been a time in your heart and in your life when you've asked, "Where is God? Where is God when I really need Him? Why is it that God seems so far away? Why is it, when I pray, all I get back is a hollow echo? Why is it that sometimes the heavens just seem brass? What's wrong? When am I going to get relief and release? How long, Lord? How long?" Listen to this psalm and see if you don't resonate with it: *“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”* (Psalms 13:1–6)

Now, the psalm, obviously, is a deeply personal psalm of someone in deep distress. It is a psalm of David, and, most likely, it was written when David is being hunted like a partridge on the mountains. Saul, his enemy, is after him, seeking for his life, and David

has prayed and said to God, “O God, help me out of this predicament. Lord, see me through. Give me an answer. Give me some light. Lighten my eyes. O God, please.” There seems to be no answer. The heavens are silent. I think we’ve all been there. I’ve been there. I mean, maybe you have a financial problem. You’ve prayed, and you asked God for the answer. And, not only does the answer not come; the problem gets worse. Things are overwhelming. Maybe you have a sickness, and maybe you thought that the sickness was healed; and now, you have a relapse. And, you’ve been praying, saying, “O God, how long is it going to take before I get through this thing?” Maybe you have a wayward child who’s breaking your heart—a son, a daughter. Maybe it’s your parents, and you’ve been praying for your parents then. It looks like the marriage is going to split up. Or, maybe there’s some other kind of a problem in your heart and in your life, and you say, “Where is God, and why doesn’t God hear my prayer?”

Now, I have to confess there are times when I pray that God seems so real you could just reach out and touch Him. And, I like those times—I mean, when we ask God for something and we say, “Lord, I need thus and such,” and He says, “All right,” and He gives it. I like those times. I’ve had prayers answered like that. I mean, I’ve had prayers answered so miraculously and instantaneously that no one will ever tell me that it was mere coincidence, that it would have happened anyway, or that God was not in it. And, we’ve all had those times when God is so close that the air just is fragrant with His presence. And, I thank God for those times, but those times are not always there. There are other times like this.

Tonight I think we need to understand how God works in times like these and what God just may be up to when we pray and we have to say, “Lord, how long? How long? How long?” And, it may be that we want God to change the situation, but God is changing us. We want God to work on the problem, but God is working on a person; and that person is the person who is doing the praying. Actually, in this psalm, you’re going to find a pattern that runs through a lot of the psalms. First of all, there is a problem. It’s a problem that drives the psalmist to prayer. And then, it ends in praise, as he sees things more clearly and things come into focus. And certainly, this Psalm 13 is classic in that situation.

I. There Was a Persistent Problem

Let’s look at the problem, if we can. It’s in verses 1 and 2: “*How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever?*”—now, first of all, there’s what I want to call, in these two verses, a “persistent problem,” a “persistent problem.” I mean, four times in these verses he asks this question: “How long?” Look at it. “How long?” That’s in the first two words. And then, in the middle of that first verse—“*how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?*”—then verse 2 begins—“*How long shall I take counsel in my soul?*”—and then, verse 2 ends—

“how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalms 13:1–2) “Lord, it’s been a long, long time. I’ve got a persistent problem; I’ve got a nagging problem. When are you going to do something about it, Lord?”

You know, one thing you find out about God: God just can’t be rushed. You can’t hurry Him up. As a matter of fact, if you’ll read over there in the book of the Revelation, chapter 6, about verse 10, I believe, the Bible gives a very poignant picture. It speaks of the souls of those who were martyred for Jesus. I believe they had their heads cut off. They’re martyrs. And, the Bible pictures them as being under the altar, and these souls who were martyred—they’re saying, “Lord, how long before you’re going to avenge us of our enemies?” (Revelation 6:10) That’s way over yonder in the book of the Revelation. God sometimes moves in majestic slowness. And, we might as well admit it, whether we can understand, whether we like it or not: God doesn’t seem to be in a hurry.

I remember reading in the gospels about a woman who had a nagging problem, an issue of blood, for eighteen years before she got healed. I wonder if she didn’t say to the Lord sometimes, “Lord, how long? Lord, how long?” I read about another man—I think in John chapter 5—who was a paralytic—“impotent,” the Bible calls him (John 5:7)—there, in the pool of Bethesda. The Bible said he’s been there for thirty-eight years in this condition before Jesus healed him. (John 5:5) Now, you think God just discovered he was there after thirty-eight years, or do you think the Lord knew it the whole time? I wonder if this man had not prayed, like David prayed, “Lord, how long is it going to be before you do something?” Well, excuse me, actually, his problem was threefold.

A. **He Felt Forgotten**

First of all, he felt forgotten. Look in verse 1: *“How long [will you] forget me, O LORD?”* (Psalms 13:1) He said, “Lord, you’ve just forgotten me.” Have you ever noticed how, when we’re having a good time, time seems to go by just like that—on winged feet—but when we have difficulty, it goes by with feet of lead? And, we say, “Time flies when you’re having fun.” Or, the frog said, “Time is fun when you’re having flies.” But, time just goes by like that when we’re having a good time. But, when we’re in the middle of a problem, it just seems like that God is...He doesn’t even know what’s happening to us, and we think God has forgotten us.

Now, I want to tell you this: if you think God has forgotten you, He hasn’t, okay? Now, no matter whether you understand it or not, God has not forgotten you. I’ll tell you what God has forgotten: God has forgotten your sins. That’s what He’s forgotten. He says, “I will remember their iniquities against them no more.” (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17) “Well,” you say, “How can God forget anything?” Well, He doesn’t forget it; He

remembers it against you no more. When God sees that sin now, God sees that sin as forgiven and under the blood, and He has therefore forgotten it as a sin that needs to be judged. But, God has not forgotten you.

Let me give you some scriptures I looked at this afternoon. Isaiah 49, verse 14: *“But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”* (Isaiah 49:14) And then, God says, “A mother may even forget her child, but you are engraved on the palm of my hand.” (Isaiah 49:15–16) Don’t you ever let the devil tell you God’s forgotten you. God says, “Even a mother...” (Isaiah 49:15)—and that would be a rare thing for a mother to forget her baby. You mammas know that is true. But, He said, “It’s possible.” But then, God says, “I’ve got you engraved on my hand.” (Isaiah 49:16) I thought about that—what that means.

And, when I thought about that—God says, “I have you engraved on my hands” —I thought of an evangelist friend of mine, E. J. Daniels. E. J. is in heaven now. Some of you may have heard E. J. Daniels preach. He’s a dear brother. But, E. J. had a habit. When I would be talking with him about something and he would not want to forget it, he reached in his pocket, got his ballpoint pen, and would write it on the palm of his hand. And, I’ve seen him do that many times—and have that ink right there on the palm of his hand, so that when he lifted his hand to do whatever it was, what he wanted to remember (so he wouldn’t forget) would be on the palm of his hand. And, I wonder if that’s not what God has done with each of us.

God says, “Even when a mother forgets her child, remember this: I have not forgotten you.” (Isaiah 49:15–16) So, David was wrong when he thought that God had forgotten him. As a matter of fact, in Psalms 27, verse 10, he gets it right: he says, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.”* (Psalms 27:10) So, He hasn’t forgotten you.

B. He Felt Forsaken

But, not only did he feel forgotten; he literally felt forsaken. Look at it again: he says, *“[O LORD,] how long wilt thou”—“How long wilt thou”—“forget me, O LORD? for ever?”*—and then, he says—*“how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?”* (Psalms 13:1) It’s not only like he has been forgotten; he’s been forsaken. Not only has God forgotten where he is; God’s turned His back on him. God has forsaken him—that’s what he feels like. God is just literally hiding His face from him. And, maybe you feel that God has a grudge against you—not only has He forgotten where you are, but He, actually, He’s turned His back on you; He has hidden His face from you. Now, He’s playing hide and seek with you.

Now remember, the face of God—the face of God—speaks of God’s loving-kindness. Remember Sunday morning when we preached on the Trinity, and we told

you how God wanted to bless Israel? And, God gave Israel the blessing—and in Numbers chapter 6 and verses 22 and following: *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise [shall] ye...bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”* (Numbers 6:22–26) David said, “I don’t sense that. I don’t sense God’s face shining toward me. I don’t. I can’t—I can’t—discern His countenance.” Even if you don’t know that God’s face is toward you, it is, unless there’s sin in your heart and in your life. His face is toward you in the darkest night.

Years and years ago, I heard about a father who had buried his precious wife when she was a young woman. They had one son, this family did. And, the father decided that night that the little boy needed to sleep with daddy after the funeral. And, they were there in that dark room—the little boy there, alongside his daddy. He wasn’t used to sleeping with his dad, but the two of them were there. And, the little fellow was sleeping where mamma used to sleep. They lay there in the silence for a while, and the little boy said, “Daddy—Daddy—it’s dark. I can’t even see you, Daddy.” And, the Daddy said, “Yes, Son, it’s really dark.” And then, he said, “Daddy, is your face toward me?” And, the dad said, “Yes, Son, my face is toward you.” He said, “That’s good, Daddy. Good night,” and he went to sleep. And, after the little fellow went to sleep, the dad crawled out of bed and got on his knees—said, “Father, it is dark. It’s very dark. Father, is your face toward me?” And, God whispered to him, “My child, my face is toward you.” Now, you may be in the dark, and you may feel forgotten, but you’re not. And, you may feel forsaken, but you’re not.

C. He Felt Frustrated

And, you may feel frustrated, because that was his other problem. Look—he says in verse 2: *“How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?”* (Psalms 13:2) “God, I can’t get this problem solved. I take counsel in my soul. I try to reason it out. I can’t handle this problem.” Have you ever been there? Folks, I’ve been there. And, every honest person has been there, if you just...you get frustrated and you think that the problem will not be solved. I want to tell you something: God has not forgotten you; God has not forsaken you, and the problem will be solved—the problem will be solved—maybe not the way you want it solved. But, you see, God is a sovereign God.

Let me give you some verses. If you have been bombarding heaven and saying, “Nothing is happening,” well, maybe nothing is happening that you’re seeing. One of my favorite verses in all the Bible is Philippians 1:6: *“Being confident of this very thing...he [who] hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”* God

doesn't have any half-built towers. God doesn't have any unfinished projects. Now, if God began a good work in you, God will perform it. Whether you understand it or not, whether it makes sense to you or not, Romans 8:28 and 29 is still in the book: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...who are the called according to his purpose"*—and what is His purpose? Well, verse 29—*"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."* (Romans 8:28–29) Now, that's God's purpose, and God is working toward His purpose. Another verse you might want to put in the margin is—one that was a blessing to me today—is Psalms 138 and verse 8: *"The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me"*—*"The LORD will perfect..."* (Psalms 138:8) Do you know what the word *perfect* means? It means "finished," "complete."

Now, we don't like the way God does it sometimes. We don't like God's timing. We don't like God's method. And, sometimes we cry out to God.

I had a problem a few years ago. It was so big to me, because someone I loved hurt so very much. It wasn't my personal problem. It would have been much easier if it had been my personal problem. It was a problem that somebody I loved had. And, I was driving in my car, the tears just flowing. I shouted at God—shouted at Him. I didn't use these words, but it was just what I meant: "God, how long?" It wasn't irreverence. I wasn't mad at God. But, I think we all feel this sometimes.

But folks, we need to understand that God is there. And, if you will be honest, you'll have to admit that the times you have grown the most spiritually were those times when you were in the deepest problem or facing the biggest sorrow. Isn't that strange? But, that is true. That's what the psalmist says in Psalms chapter 4 and verse 1: *"thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress"*—*"thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress."* (Psalms 4:1) Like it or not, it is true.

II. There Was a Prevailing Prayer

Now, there was the perplexing problem. Okay, now look at the prevailing prayer. Notice how he prays now, beginning in verses 3 and 4. Here's the prayer: *"Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death"*—*"Lord, this thing is killing me"*—*"Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved."* (Psalms 13:3–4) Now, this, I'm sure, is only a synopsis of days, weeks, hours of prayer. It's only a condensed version of what he has been praying out of his heart. And, problems did what they were supposed to do: they drove him to prayer. God loves us too much to let us live independent of Him. So, his problems drove him to prayer.

But, notice the One to whom he prays: he says, *"Consider and hear me, O LORD my God."* (Psalms 13:3) Now, if you remember Sunday morning's sermon, he says,

“Remember me, Jehovah, my Elohim”—Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God; Elohim, the Almighty, the God of promise and the God of power. The God of promise—Yahweh, Jehovah. The God of power—Elohim. “Remember me, O God, God that keeps a covenant and God that can do anything. You’re the One, Lord, that I call to.” And, you see, David did have a...he had a covenant. David had been anointed king. Samuel had said, “You’re God’s chosen. You’re God’s anointed.” In a way, he knew that Saul couldn’t kill him, ’cause he had not yet been crowned. He had a promise from God, and he’s praying on the basis of that promise. And, you know, that’s good praying, isn’t it? To get a promise from God—to pray on the basis of who God is, what God can do, and what God has said that He will do. Our own John Phillips said—and I love this phrase—he said, “David had all of these emotions, but he nailed his emotions to a promise of God.” That’s good: “He nailed his emotions to a promise of God.” He’s doing that kind of praying right now—very powerful prayer.

As I looked at this, I thought of that command in the New Testament that tells us to do exactly what David was doing right now. Philippians 4, verses 6 and following: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your [request] be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep”—shall garrison—“your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus [our Lord].”* (Philippians 4:6–7) It doesn’t say that God’s going solve your problem; it says God will give you peace and that God will do those that thing. And so, I’m going to leave that point, except to say that this: this perplexing problem led to prevailing prayer.

III. There Was a Proper Perspective

And, the prevailing prayer led to a proper perspective. Now, now look, if you will, in verses 5 and 6: he says, *“But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”* (Psalms 13:5–6) Now, what has changed? David has changed. It’s the same man that is whining and complaining in the first two verses is now praising. It doesn’t say that Saul has died or that David has suddenly got reinforcement. David has refocused. He says, “Now, I’ve been looking at the problem. Lord, I’m going to gaze upon you.” Look at the word but: *“But”—“but”—“I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”* (Psalms 13:5–6) And, in those verses, I see three things: number one, unshakeable faith; number two, unspeakable joy; number three, overwhelming praise.

A. Unshakeable Faith

Look at the unshakeable faith: *“But I have trusted in thy mercy.”* (Psalms 13:5) “God,

whether it seems to me that you're merciful or not, I put my faith in the fact that you are a God of mercy." One paraphrase gives it this way: "I have thrown myself headlong into thy arms." That's neat, isn't it? "I have thrown myself headlong into your arms. I am trusting your mercy." That is unshakeable faith.

B. Unspeakable Joy

And then, there's unspeakable joy: "*my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.*" (Psalms 13:5) Friend, if you're saved, you've got a lot to rejoice in, no matter what else happens. "*The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared [to] the glory [that] shall be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18) But, I don't think David is merely talking about salvation, dying, and going to heaven. He's saying, "In your deliverance." The word *salvation* means "deliverance." "God, you're going to get me out of this. You're going to work me through this. I mean, before it happens, I, by faith, cast myself on your mercy. I rejoice in your deliverance."

C. Unquenchable Praise

Unshakeable faith, unspeakable joy, unquenchable praise: "*I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.*" (Psalms 13:6) Here's a man saying, "Lord, I'm about to die. My problems are overwhelming me." And then, he gets to thinking about God and the blessings that God has given him. And, he doesn't just say, "Lord, you're all right. You've done so-so." He says, "*[God, you've] dealt bountifully with me.*" (Psalms 13:6) And, I'm going to tell you tonight, I don't care who you are or how big your problem is, if you will begin to think about the blessings that God has given you, you'll have to say, "God, you've dealt bountifully with me."

Have you ever thought about how God does something? He just does it bountifully. I mean, He just doesn't give us life; He gives us eternal life. He doesn't give us peace; He gives us perfect peace. He doesn't give us grace; He gives us abounding grace. He doesn't just give us victory; He makes us more than conquerors. So, why shouldn't we praise Him? And, it just may be that if you're in the middle of a great big problem, God is just working on you until you get your focus back on Him and begin to thank Him for what He's already given you, for what He's already done. And, understand that He has not forsaken you; He has not forgotten you. He will see you through. Hallelujah!

Conclusion

Let's pray. Lord God, I have preached to my own heart tonight, and teach me in a greater way the truth that is in this beautiful psalm. And Lord, I pray tonight if there are those here who have burdens that are so great they seemed to be crushed beneath the load, Lord, that they might refocus on you and throw themselves headlong into your arms tonight. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Now, look at me. Perhaps tonight you have never given your heart to Christ. Psalms like this are not just for anybody; they're for the redeemed, those who can rejoice in God's salvation. So, if you're not saved, you need to be saved. And, you can be saved tonight if you'll understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that Christ took your sins upon Himself. He carried those sins to the cross, and with His blood He paid for your sin. He made atonement for your sin. He paid your sin-debt with His blood. He's shown to be the Son of God able to save by the fact that God raised Him from the dead. And, He promises to save you if you'll receive Him in repentance and faith. And, if you'd like to trust Him tonight, once and for all, now and forever, as your personal Savior and Lord, when Jim Whitmire leads us in this invitational hymn, I'm going to ask the ministers of our church to stand at the head of each of these aisles. And tonight, if you're willing to receive Christ as your personal Savior and Lord and you're unashamed of Jesus, I'm going to ask you to leave your seat and just come forward.

Can an Intellectual Believe in God?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 30, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 19

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

PSALMS 19:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Declaration of the Skies
 - A. They Speak of the Glory of God
 - B. They Speak of the Greatness of God
 - C. They Speak of the Goodness of God
- II. The Revelation of the Scriptures
 - A. The Virtue of the Scriptures
 - B. The Value of the Scripture
 1. The Scripture Is Precious
 2. The Scripture Is Protective
 3. The Scripture Is Profitable
- III. The Illumination of the Spirit
 - A. The Conviction of the Spirit
 - B. The Cleansing of the Spirit
 - C. The Control of the Spirit
 - D. The Communion of the Spirit

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Word and find, please, Psalm chapter 19, the nineteenth Psalm. When you've found it, look up here, and I want to read to you from a little leaflet that has been handed to me. The title of this leaflet is "An Invitation to the Intellectual Elite." Now, I wonder if you're a part of the intellectual elite. This says, if you accept that, number one: God is a myth; humankind's future is in its own hands. Number two: Prayers are what you say to yourself. Success in life depends upon human effort. Three: Humans are part of nature and developed in it. What purpose there is in life, humans make. When you die, your life is over forever. Only your ideas can survive. Next: Humankind is

responsible for what it does. There are no sins. Crimes cannot be forgiven by religious rights. Next: The time to live is now. The place to live is here, and the way to be happy is to make yourself and others happy. Now, this little leaflet has been presented by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the infamous atheist. It's by the American Atheist Association in Austin, Texas. And so, if you believe that it all just happened, there is no God, there is no such thing as sin, and that man is the sum the substance the center and the circumference of everything; if you believe that, according to her, you are a part of the intellectual elite.

Well, I want to ask you this question today: Can an intelligent man—can an intellectual—believe in God? With that in mind, I want us to look here in Psalm 19. And, I begin in verse 1. Now, I'm going to read the whole Psalm before I'm finished, but, first of all, the first six verses: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof"* (Psalm 19:1–6). Now, God has spoken, and anybody who wants to believe in God can believe in God. And, if a man does not believe in God, it is not because he has intellectual difficulties; it is because he has moral difficulties. And, I want to make that very clear and very plain. Unbelief never comes out of the head. Unbelief always comes out of the heart. The Bible says, in another Psalm, Psalm 14, *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"* (Psalm 14:1).

Now, can you be an intellectual and believe in God? Absolutely! Many intellectuals believe in God, and many non-intellectuals believe in God. Some intellectuals don't believe in God, and many non-intellectuals don't believe in God. As matter of fact, your intellect has very little to do with it. But, I want you to know that if you want to believe in God, you can believe in God. And, God has spoken in three mighty ways. And, we're going to see that, as we look in the Psalm 19, not only has God spoken to mankind in general in these three ways, but God will speak to you in these three ways.

Now, what are the three ways in which God speaks to you? How can you know beyond the shadow of any doubt or peradventure that God exists, that He loves you, that you can know Him, and that you can have a personal, vital relationship with Him, and still call yourself an intellectual?

I. The Declaration of the Skies

Number one: There is the declaration in the skies. You have it? The declaration in the

skies. Look in verse 1: *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1). That’s the declaration in the skies. The very skies themselves tell you that God exists. The heavens above tell us that God exists. And, what do they tell us about God?

A. They Speak of the Glory of God

Well, first of all, they tell us about God’s glory. *“The heavens declare the glory of God.”*

Several years ago, Joyce and I took a vacation down to the Bahamas. And, I wanted to be alone with her, and just to have some *think time*, and we found a little cottage there on a beach, and it had a little dock out in front of it. And, it was absolutely wonderful. There was no air conditioning in that cottage, and we had to leave the windows open and fight mosquitoes all night. But, nonetheless, it was wonderful, that little dock out there. We went out at nighttime. There was no television, nothing like that, no telephone; as a matter of fact, no automobiles on that little island. You just took footpaths. And, to get from place to place, we had a little boat that you had to go, with a little outboard motor. It was wonderful. But, the most wonderful thing about the vacation, the thing we remember more than anything else: we went out on the dock, out there in that Caribbean water, and laid down on our backs and looked up at the stars, and for about—well, I don’t know how long—an extended period of time, just the two of us, on our backs, on that dock, just looking at the sky. Folks, if you haven’t done that in a long time, I want to recommend it. Just get out somewhere where there’s no ambient light around, where there’s nothing else, just the candelabra of Heaven, and just look up at God’s stars and think about those stars. Think how vast His mighty universe is. And, you will be filled with a sense, an awe that David must have had as a shepherd boy when he looked up and saw those heavens, and he wrote here in Psalm 19, *“The heavens declare the glory of God.”*

B. They Speak of the Greatness of God

But, not only do they speak of the glory of God; they speak of the greatness of God. Look, if you will, in verse 1 again: *“The firmament”*—that’s another word for the heavens—*“sheweth his handywork”* (Psalm 19:1). That is, all of this is the work of God. God created it all. He made it out of nothing. What great, incredible power is seen in the creation of this universe!

Now, you know that out of nothing, nothing comes. And, this is the great stumbling block for the atheist. If he doesn’t in a self-existing God, he has to believe in a self-existing universe, or else he has to believe that nothing times nobody equals everything. It’s really kind of intellectually contradictory not to believe in God. The Bible never argues the fact of God. The Bible just presents God: *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). Why? Because we all know that out of nothing, nothing comes. A very eloquent and gifted black preacher said one time—and I love

this. He said, “God stepped from behind the curtain of nowhere and stood upon the platform of nothing and spoke a world into existence.” You know, man can’t create anything. All the scientists can do is re-arrange what God has created.

You think of these heavens—the incredible size of the heavens. You know that light travels 186,282 miles per second. How fast is that? Well, 1,000, 2,000, it’s past the moon. Two seconds, light travels past the moon. But, traveling more, that 182,282 miles per second, it takes it 4 ½ years to pass our closest star, our nearest star. And, traveling at that incredible rate of the speed of light, in order to reach the edge of our known universe, we would have to travel at that incredible speed at the edge of our known universe for 10 billion years—past the moon in two seconds. God made all of that. That’s the incredible size of it.

And, you think of not only the immensity, but you think there of the intricacy of God’s creation. I mean the Psalmist said in another place, considering himself, *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14). The smallest unit in your body is the cell. There are over 30 billion of them in your body. And yet, Paul Doty of Harvard University said that one cell in your body is more complicated than New York City, and I hope a lot better shape than New York City. But, there are billions of these things, and they’re so incredibly complicated. We’ve heard a lot about DNA today, and I don’t even know enough to even begin to talk about it, except to say that God has put together a universe with great immensity and great complexity. And, it’s all the work of God’s hands. And, therefore it’s absolute stupidity not to believe in God. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, in Romans chapter 1, verses 19 and 20, *“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:19–20).

Now, let me tell you something. Of all of the professional groups, do you know what professional group has the highest—I’m talking about secular professional groups—has the highest number of believers in God? The astronomers. Over 90 percent of the world’s great astronomers believe in God. Isn’t that interesting? Because—why? I mean they study the heavens. They have been in awe. It’s not a sign of intelligence not to believe in God. Why, if you’re intelligent, you have to say, “Somebody created all of this.”

Dr. Moody tells us that there have been in the history of the world 54 great philosophers. In 6,000 years of recorded history, only 54 philosophers could be called great. And, we’re talking about people like Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, and others—only 54 great philosophers in the history of the world. Now, let me tell you something of these 54 great philosophers. Out of the 54, 40 of them believed in God. Now, Madalyn

Murray O'Hair is talking about the intellectuals. Forty of them believed in God. Of the 14 who did not believe in God—listen to this—all of them hated their father. It's a very interesting thing. Every one of those great philosophers who did not believe in God hated their father. Eight of them were preacher's sons, and their fathers were legalistic preachers.

I was recently in London, went to the British Museum of Natural History. There is a statue of Charles Darwin in that museum, and the museum is just one big colossal lie. It's all about evolution, and they talk about evolution as if it is a fact. And, Charles Darwin's statue is in that particular British museum, and I looked upon his visage just a few days ago. Let me tell you about Charles Darwin. I'm talking about these philosophers who did not believe in God. Charles Darwin had a father that he hated. Charles Darwin's father was a physician, and he was a monstrous man. He was six feet three inches tall, weighed 345 pounds. When he spoke, it was like the roar of a lion. And, he had huge hairy hands. Charles Darwin was frightened to death of him. And, he could never please his father. He said—and here's a direct quote from Charles Darwin. He said, "My father could not stand to be opposed. If opposed, he would roar at me. And, he had the gift of always making people do just as he wanted them to do." Now, Charles' mother died when he was a little boy, when he was eight. But, he wrote later on he couldn't remember anything about his mother—not one thing about his mother. He remembered things that happened to him when he was four, five, and six years of age, but he couldn't remember anything about his mother. But, he did remember that when his mother died, he had a deep resentment to his father, because his father was a doctor. And, he said, "My father was a doctor who healed others, but he let my mother die."

Now, Charles Darwin went to school. He failed in school. His father came in and bullied the teachers, and somehow he got a passing grade, and he graduated. Then, his father wanted him to go to medical school. Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, went to medical school. He couldn't hack it in medical school. As a matter of fact, when he had his first autopsy, when they had to work on a cadaver, he fainted; he passed out. He said, "I can't do it." He couldn't stand surgery. He flopped out of medical school. Then his father said, "Well, maybe you can be a preacher. You know, if you can't do anything else, maybe you can preach." So, his father said, "Well, maybe you can be a minister," and enrolled Charles Darwin in seminary. And, Charles Darwin there in seminary was studying the Bible, his father saying, "You're going to be a preacher."

But there he met a biologist, a man who became a father figure to him and got him interested in biology. So, he dropped out of seminary, and he began to travel. And, you remember his trips. You know he went to the Indies. He went to Brazil. He went to the Galapagos Islands and so forth. He began to make pictures and drawings of biology,

and he began to get this idea concerning evolution. Now, actually, Charles Darwin didn't come up with evolution. As a matter of fact, Aristotle and others had already toyed with the idea of evolution. But, Charles Darwin now began to say, "Well, maybe, how can I explain all this apart from God?" And, for 35 more years, he was sickly. He was hating God, hating his father, hating everybody. Finally, he wrote his book, *The Descent of Man* and *The Origin of the Species*. And, he effectively explained how you can have creation without a Creator, so he thought. It's the next best guess of the mind and the man that rejects God.

Now there was another man who bought into this. His name was Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a philosopher also—Friedrich Nietzsche. Friedrich Nietzsche, by the way, was the son of a dogmatic preacher, and he hated his father. He learned to hate God. He learned to hate the idea of God. Nietzsche became a sexual pervert. As a matter of fact, he died of syphilis, and he died insane. But, he got the idea, if there's no God, then man must be ever onward and upward. He had the idea that somehow man could become superman—not fly through the air, but just he could achieve all that he wanted to achieve.

And so, you've got Darwin—hated his dad; you've got Nietzsche—hated his father; one the son of a preacher, the other the son of a physician. A madman named Adolf Hitler got hold of the works of Darwin and Nietzsche, especially Nietzsche, who had been molded by Darwin. And, Adolf Hitler wrote, after he got to thinking about what Nietzsche had said, and Darwin had said, he wrote his own book, *Mein Kampf*. That was his plan to make the Aryan race the super race, the idea of a super race. And, he had a venomous hatred toward the Jewish people. And, Adolf Hitler said, in *Mein Kampf*, "I have a right to eliminate an inferior race that breeds like vermin." He was talking about the Jews.

Now, we're talking about intellectuals and believing in God. Can an intellectual believe in God? Every so often, you will hear people say something like this, Brother Bob. You will hear people say, "You know, the trouble with religion is there are so many religious wars. These religious people are fighting everybody. And, all the wars in the world are caused by religion. And, all of the people who have died have died as a result of religion." I want to give you something, folks, and I want you to listen very carefully to this, because you need to be very careful when you say that people are dying as a result of belief in God. In the 6,000 years of recorded history, in religious wars, about 6 million people have died—and, that's regrettable, but about 6 million people. Did you know that Hitler and Stalin alone, both who rejected the idea of God, Hitler and Stalin alone are responsible for the death of 57 million people—a conservative estimate. Six million, all religious wars; 57 million of those who say there is no God? So don't let anybody put that on you, that if you believe in God, somehow you are a part of all of the

trouble, dissension, and all of this problem in the world.

As a matter of fact, we're talking about all religious wars. We are talking about people from Muslims and Hindus and oriental religions. If you talk about religious wars that involve Christians, those who are Christians—about 1.8 million. If you talk about those who are Bible-believing, what we call evangelical Christians, less than a quarter of a million. But, if you're talking about people like Nietzsche and Darwin and Hitler and Stalin and Karl Marx, 57 million have been slaughtered. And, the number is growing. No. Listen, friend. An intellectual can be an intellectual and believe in God. The great intellectuals have believed in God.

C. They Speak of the Goodness of God

And, when you look at the heavens, they declare God's glory. When you look in the heavens, they declare God's greatness. And, when you look in the heavens, they declare God's goodness. Look, if you will, in verse 2: "*Day unto day uttereth speak, and night unto night sheweth knowledge*" (Psalm 19:2). Now, what does that mean? It means there is a fixed order in the universe. Day follows night, and night follows day. There is beauty, there is order, there is harmony, and you can say, "Thank God, His mercies are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23). What a good God we serve! God is a glorious God. God is a great God. God is a good God. And, the light and the warmth of the sun speak of the light and warmth of God's grace. To look up in those stars is something. To rise in the morning and see the sunrise is something. You'd have to feel sorry for an atheist who would see a sunset and have nobody to thank for it, wouldn't you? You just have to feel sorry for him.

II. The Revelation of the Scriptures

So, there is the declaration of the skies: "*The heavens declare the glory of God.*" But, let's move on to the second thing. Not only is there the declaration of the skies, but there is the revelation of the Scriptures. That's the second way we know. First of all, God's Word written in the heavens. And number two, God's Word written in the Bible—the revelation of the Scriptures. Now, continue to read, if you will. Look, if you will, in verse 7—here's the second way that you can know God: "*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward*" (Psalm 19:7–11).

You see, you can know about the fact of God by studying the heavens, but you can never know the heart and mind of God by looking at the stars. You need more than that kind of natural revelation. You have to see not only what God has wrought, but you have to see what God has taught. You have to have the Bible. You have to have the Word of God to explain to you this God that you see in general in nature. And so, the Psalmist speaks not only of the declaration of the skies, but the revelation of the Scriptures.

A. The Virtue of the Scriptures

And, first of all, he speaks of the virtue of the Scriptures. Look in verse 7: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul”* (Psalm 19:7). The only way that you can be saved is by the perfect Word of God. *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23). It is the Word of God that converts the soul. It is the Word of God, the entrance of His Word, that gives light. And, the Bible says it’s perfect. This speaks of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. Every sentence, every syllable, every jot, every pen stroke, were put there by the mind, the purpose, of God. It is absolutely perfect, and Jesus said, *“The scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35).

And then, look, if you will, in verse 7: *“The testimony of the LORD”*—not only is it perfect; it—*“is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7). You want to be a true intellectual? Get in the Word of God. Friend, it’s sure. What does that mean? It means you have a firm place to stand. You have a foundation. You’re not building on Jell-O. And, here’s the wonderful thing about it: *“God hath hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hath revealed them unto babes”* (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21). *“Making wise the simple”*: an ordinary person without a Ph.D.—an ordinary person—can go to God’s Word and receive food for his soul. So clear, so plain, is the Word of God that *“a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein”* (Isaiah 35:8).

And then, look in verse 8: *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart”* (Psalm 19:8). The word *right* here has the idea of a straight path. It means the Bible will never lead you astray. Hallelujah for that! You know, so many times we thought that God’s will is hard, and God’s way is onerous and difficult. Oh, no, no, no! Listen—listen to it again: *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.”* Oh, how we ought to delight in the Word of God! To delight in God’s way—what a joy there is in knowing God’s Word! God’s way is not difficult and hard and onerous. *“The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”* (Psalm 84:11). His way is a way of joy. *If I had a thousand lives, I would give them all to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

And then, notice also in verse 8: *“The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”* (Psalm 19:8). Now, that means there is no mixture of evil, no

mixture of error. There are over 6,000 promises in this book, and every one of them is *yea* and *amen* in the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). And, not a one of His promises has ever failed, ever been broken.

Then, look in verse 9: *“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever”* (Psalm 19:9). What does that mean? There are no seeds of corruption in God’s Word. It will last and last and last. It’s been several millenniums since David wrote this, and we’re holding it in our hands today. It lasts. *“The earth passes away, the flower of the field withers, but the Word of our God endures forever”* (Isaiah 40:8). It is the incorruptible Word of God. The Bible is never out of date. It applies to every age. It never needs to be updated or revised. Thank God for the inerrant, infallible, incorruptible Word of God. That’s the virtues of the Scriptures.

B. The Value of the Scripture

Now, once you see the virtue of the Scripture, then you can understand the value of the Scripture. Look, if you will, in verse 10, as we talk about the value of the Scripture: *“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”* (Psalm 19:10).

1. The Scripture Is Precious

The Scriptures are precious. To a true believer there is nothing more precious than the Word of God. And, a man cannot truly love God without loving the Word of God. This is the value of the Scripture.

2. The Scripture Is Protective

Not only is it precious; it is protective. Look in verse 11 of this same chapter: *“Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward”* (Psalm 19:11). Protection is better than cure. The Word of God will keep you from so many hurts, so many harms, if you will only bathe your soul in its truth and walk in its light.

3. The Scripture Is Profitable

It’s precious. It is protective. It is profitable. Look in verse 11: *“In keeping of them there is great reward”* (Psalm 19:11). You want to be rewarded, you want to be wise: take the Word of God that is pure and clean and right and righteous. It endures forever. And, live by them. What fools we are not to saturate ourselves with the Word of God!

III. The Illumination of the Spirit

So, how has God spoken to us? Well, there is the declaration of the skies. There is the revelation of the Scriptures. But now, wait just a minute; we’re still not finished. Even though you might walk out one night and see the stars, and say there is a God, and believe it, and you might pick up this book, hear somebody preach this book, and you say, “Yes, I believe the Bible is the Word of God,” you’re still not home yet. There’s still

one more thing that you need to really know God. First of all, the declaration of the skies—*“The heavens declare the glory of God.”* And then, the inspiration of the Word of the Bible—*“The word of God is perfect, converting the soul.”* But, thirdly—and, listen carefully—there must be the illumination of the Spirit. When you get the Holy Spirit of God who takes what you see objectively in nature, and then subjectively and spiritually He interprets that to you, then you can know God.

So, look and see how this Psalm ends. Look at it now, beginning in verse 12 on through verse 14: *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.”* Now, he’s talking to God. He’s praying to God. *“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”* Now, here here’s the bottom line of the whole thing: *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:12–14).

Now, this is what I call the illumination of the Spirit, these last verses beginning in verse 12. And, this tells us how God the Holy Spirit takes what we see in nature and what we see in the Bible, and how God then begins to apply that to our hearts. And, if you have the first two without the third one, you’re still not going to be there. But, if you will now let the illumination of the Spirit take what God’s Word in the heavens, and God’s Word in your hand, the Bible, and put God’s Word in your heart, then, friend, you’re going to see something very wonderful and very beautiful.

Now, let me show you what the Holy Spirit will do for you today, okay? Now, let’s just look, beginning in verse 12. What will the Holy Spirit of God do?

A. The Conviction of the Spirit

Well, first of all, the Holy Spirit—there is the conviction of the Spirit. Look in verse 12: *“Who can understand his errors?”* You can’t do it. You don’t have what it takes. Only the Holy Spirit of God can help you to understand. You see, before we can know God, we’ve got to be clean of sin. And, who can convict us of sin? Your old, carnal, dirty heart is not going to expose your old, carnal, dirty heart. As a matter of fact, the Bible says of the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament, in John chapter 16, verse 8, *“When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin”* (John 16:8).

So, look again in verse 12. He speaks again of something called *secret faults*. Look at it: *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults”* (Psalm 19:12). Did you know that you have secret faults that you don’t know anything about? Did you know that? There are things in your heart and in your life.

Now, had the seismologists not told you, had the whoever it is that studies these things not told you, you would not have known that there is a fault underneath Memphis, Tennessee. What is it? The New Madrid fault. There’s something underneath here.

Now, you look around you, don't see it. Can anybody look down and see that fault in the ground? No, but it's there. One of these days it may cause an earthquake. Now, you see, a lot of times people have moral earthquakes, because they have secret faults. They don't know they are there.

Do you know why some people fall into sin? Let me tell you what a lot of sin is. And, this may happen to you if you don't pray this prayer, "Cleanse me from secret faults." Do you know what happens? We see some people just sailing along, and all of a sudden they just collapse and they're in terrible sin. Do you know what a lot of sin is? It is an undetected weakness, an unexpected temptation, and an unprotected life. Did you get that? An undetected weakness, an unexpected temptation, and an unprotected life. Put those three things together. You don't know it's there. You have a moral fault in you, but you don't know it's there. It's a secret fault. And then, along comes some temptation. You've never been faced with it before, and you've not prayed this prayer, and you have an unprotected life, you have an undetected weakness, you have an unexpected temptation, and down you go.

Now, you can have God's Word in the skies, and God's Word in the Scriptures, and still fall, unless you have God's Word in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God that is speaking to you. And, there must be the conviction of the Spirit.

B. The Cleansing of the Spirit

And, what happens when you pray this prayer: "Oh, God, help me to understand my errors. Help me to understand my ways?" Now, you move from the conviction of the Spirit to the cleansing of the Spirit. Look in verse 12. He says here, "*Cleanse thou me from secret faults*" (Psalm 19:12). God's Holy Spirit will do subterranean surgery on you. And, there's no cleansing apart from the blood of Jesus Christ. "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

C. The Control of the Spirit

And so, for you to know God, there must be the conviction of the Spirit, the cleansing of the Spirit—but that's not enough: then, you've got to have the control of the Spirit. Look, if you will, in verse 13 of this same chapter: "*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins*" (Psalm 19:13). Now, there are those hidden faults, and then there are just those times where we sin with our eyes wide open, and we don't have the strength to say *no*. So, we must pray, "*Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me*" (Psalm 19:13).

Now, pray this prayer, because the control of the Spirit is linked to your prayer life. Every morning when you wake up, you say, "Lord, cleanse me from secret fault. Do subterranean surgery on me. And then, dear Lord, cleanse me from every sin. And now,

Lord God, keep me—keep me—from presumptuous sin.” Pray this in the morning, not at the end of the day; but pray it. Unlock the door of the morning with this key: “Oh, God, keep me.”

D. The Communion of the Spirit

You see, when there is the conviction of the Spirit, and the cleansing of the Spirit, and the control of the Spirit, then you’re going to know God, have fellowship with God, and walk with this God. And, last of all, it leads to the final thing—and, I wish I had more time: the communion of the Spirit. Look in verse 14: *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14). And, that’s when God is so real to you.

Conclusion

And, poor Madalyn Murray O’Hair, you have to feel sorry for her. Bless her heart. She doesn’t know these things. God has put His Word up there in the skies. God has put His Word in the Bible. And then, God has sent His Holy Spirit to convict you, to cleanse you, to control you, and to have communion with you. Can an intellectual believe in God? Absolutely! Beyond a shadow of any doubt. But you don’t come to God because of intellect. You come to God because He first loved us. And, God reveals Himself to us.

When I was in school, there was a man in school with us. He had been a Russian paratrooper. Nikolai Alexandrenko was his name. He was fighting back in World War II. He was at the front when the Germans were advancing on Moscow. He was put out there by the Dneiper River there to fight, and he was shot in the leg. And, the Germans were advancing. The Russians were told, “Don’t surrender—suicide rather than surrender.” But, he surrendered. He put up his hands. He didn’t want to die. The Germans took him, put him on a tank, and along with about 14 or 15 others, Alexandrenko, the boy that I went to school with, the Russian paratrooper, was taken to Munich, and he was put in a prison camp there. And, he lived for days and days on grass soup. That’s about all that he had, cold and shivering in Munich. He had been taught all of his life there is no God. He had been taught you can’t be an intellectual and believe in God. He had been taught the atheism of Karl Marx that he learned from Darwin and Nietzsche.

And then, the war was over, and he was a prisoner of war, and now he was free. He didn’t want to go back to Russia, however, because he was afraid that he’d be sent to Siberia because he had surrendered. He fled. Alexandrenko pled that he might stay in Munich. They allowed him to stay. He was in a displaced persons camp, stayed there for a long time, had no food, was cold, lonely, bitter, not understanding anything. One night he found himself in a little abandoned barracks building. And, it was very cold, and

he tried to start a fire, and he was looking around for scraps of paper, and he picked up a scrap of paper, and it was a gospel tract. It was dirty and smudged, and he only found two verses on that. He had never read the Bible before. One was Matthew 11:28: *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* The other was Revelation 3:20: *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.”* He said, “This is about God.” He said, “Could there be a God?” And Nikolai got to thinking. He said, “Who made all of this?” He got to thinking about God’s Word in the skies. “Who made all of this? Who made it?” Then, he had God’s Word in the Scriptures. “Could this be the Word of God? Could God be knocking at my heart’s door?”

And then, he bowed his head and prayed, “God, if you exist, if, O God, you are there, speak to my heart that this is Your Word.” He said, “A warm feeling came over me,” and God whispered into his innermost being, “My child, I’m here. I’ve been here all the time. I am knocking at your heart’s door.” And, Nikolai Alexandrenko said, “I began to cry.” He said, “I didn’t cry when my mama died when I was a little boy. I didn’t cry when I was wounded in the war. I didn’t cry when I ate grass soup in the prison camp. But,” he said, “I began to cry and to weep. And, I said, ‘God, thank You for showing Yourself to me.’” You see, there was God’s Word in his hand, but then God’s Word in his heart. The Holy Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit of God—began to convict Nikolai Alexandrenko. He met another Russian who was a Christian. He said, Nik, we’ll get you a Bible. And, they went to a little church there in Germany—would you guess, a little Baptist church. He didn’t know who Baptists were, but they gave him the Word of God. Nikolai Alexandrenko was born again.

I went to school with him at New Orleans Seminary. He’s earned a PhD, and he’s teaching Bible in one of our Baptist colleges. How did all of that happen? How did all of that happen? Here’s a Russian paratrooper, been raised as a child to believe there is no God, but he said, “There’s God’s Word in the skies, there’s God’s Word in the Scriptures, and now there is God’s Word by the Spirit, and God has spoken to my heart.” And, the same God that spoke to him is the God that is speaking to you right now.

Three Ways God Speaks to Us

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 5, 1989

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 19

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

PSALMS 19:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. God’s Word in the Heavens
- II. God’s Word in Your Hand
 - A. The Virtue of the Scriptures
 - B. The Value of the Scriptures
 - 1. They Are Precious
 - 2. They Are Protective
 - 3. They Are Profitable
- III. God’s Word in Your Heart
 - A. The Conviction of the Heart
 - B. The Cleansing of the Heart
 - C. The Control of the Heart
 - D. The Communion of the Heart

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn with me, please, to Psalm 19. This morning we ask this question: Can an intellectual believe in God? And, I read to you from a pamphlet presented by the American Atheist Association from Austin, Texas, printed by Madalyn Murray O’Hair’s outfit, I believe. And, they made this proposition in this pamphlet: “If you can accept that God is a myth, and that humankind’s future is in its own hands, that prayers are what you say to yourself, that success in life depends upon human effort, that humans are a part of nature and developed in it, and what purpose there is in life humans make, that when you die your life is over forever, that only our ideas can survive, that humankind is responsible for what it does, there are no sins, crimes cannot be forgiven, and so forth,” she says, “if you believe all of this, then, congratulations, you are apart of the intellectual elite.”

Well, the question is, Can you be an intellectual and believe in God? Or, let’s state it positively. This Psalm that we’re going to study tells us, yes, indeed, you can. And, I’m

going to tell you how you can know God personally if you're an intellectual. And, even better than that, how you can know Him if you're not an intellectual.

Now, don't get the idea, dear friend, that only intellectuals are atheists. Some of the most ignorant people I've ever met have been atheists. I mean, that's true. And, don't get the idea that there are no intellectuals who believe in God. I'm just looking over here for example at Dr. Larry Walker, a Hebrew scholar. Now, he's an intellectual; I mean, in the true sense of the word. Dr. Walker, I believe you are a true intellectual. He's forgotten more than I'll ever learn. But, one thing about it, he may be smarter than I am, but he can't love Jesus better than I can. And, that's so wonderful! You see, the one thing that means more than anything else is loving God. And, when it comes to that, you just have to lay your intellectual pride in the dust. And, little children can love God just like mighty intellects can love God. In the Scriptures, the Scriptures are deep enough for the scholars to swim in and never touch bottom, and yet they're shallow enough that a little child can come and get a drink without fear of drowning. Isn't the Word of God wonderful?

So, here are these folks who are saying, "Well, if you're really, truly an intellectual, you don't have to believe in God." Well, this beautiful Psalm deals with that subject, and I want to us to look here in Psalm chapter 19 and verse 1. And, in a moment I'm going to show you three ways God speaks to you so you can know Him.

I. God's Word in the Heavens

And, I told you this morning that God speaks, first of all, in the heavens. There is God's Word in the heavens. That's what we call the confirming Word of God. They just declare that God is. They just confirm the existence of God. And, you can know the existence of God rationally. I mean it's rational to believe in God. The Bible says you don't have any excuse for not believing in God, in Romans 1.

I told you this morning that 90 percent of all astronomers believe in God. Why? Because "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1). There have only been 54 great philosophers that have lived in 6,000 years of recorded history. Of those 54 great philosophers, 40 of them believed in God. So, it's almost a misnomer to say *godless philosophy*. Of the 14 who did not believe in God, every one of them hated their father—every one of them. We talked about two of them, Darwin and Nietzsche, who hated their overbearing fathers. And, because of their hatred for their fathers, and their association with a father figure and God, they had this antipathy towards this idea of God. And, we're telling you, dear friend, that it's not a sign of intelligence not to believe in God. "*The heavens declare the glory of God.*" And, I read these verses, and I showed how the heavens speak of the glory, greatness, goodness, and grace of God. And, that is what we call God's confirming Word in the heavens.

II. God's Word in Your Hand

But, oh, friend, we can't stop there, because that's not enough. What we learn by nature is not enough. And so, the Bible goes on to say now, in Psalm 19:7, where we left off this morning: *"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward"* (Psalm 19:7–11). Now, this doesn't speak of God's Word in the heavens. This speaks of God's Word in your hand—the Bible, the law of the Lord. Oh, thank God for the Bible!

The Bible is not the book of the month. It is the book of the ages. It is the book of all books. It has out-lived, out-lifted, out-looked, out-loved, out-reached, out-ranked, and out-blessed all other books put together. Its emotional depths and emotional heights have never been completely discovered by anybody. Thank God for the Bible. Emperors have decreed its extermination. Atheists like Madalyn Murray O'Hair rail at it. Agnostics have cynically smiled at it. Modernists and liberals have diluted it. Materialists have ignored it. Radicals have twisted and changed it. Cults have polluted it. But, my dear friend, it still stands. It is the Word of God. In spite of the denials, in spite of the distortions, in spite of all of these things, thank God for this book, the Bible.

Now, I want you to see how the Bible describes itself.

A. The Virtue of the Scriptures

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call tonight the virtue of the Scriptures. He mentions these virtues. First of all, he says, *"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul"* (Psalm 19:7). Do you see that? It's perfect. Now, that means there's nothing to add to it. You can't add to it. You can't take away from it. It's complete. It speaks of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. When we say the *inspiration* of the Bible, we mean that all of it is inspired from Genesis to Revelation. When we say the *verbal inspiration* of the Bible, we mean that every word is inspired. Jesus said, in Matthew 4:4, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

Now, the liberals say, "Oh, the thoughts are inspired, but not the words." Dear friend, you can't have thoughts without words. If you change the words, you change the thoughts. You can't have thoughts without words anymore than you can have mathematics without numbers. And, you change the numbers, you change the equation. You change the words, you change it. God gave His Word. And, I believe, as God gave

the Scriptures, every sentence, every syllable, every jot, every pen stroke, was put there by the mind and the purpose of God. And, the Bible says, *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.”* It changes men from light to darkness. You know, this book is so powerful.

J. B. Phillips, who wrote a modern translation of the Scripture, he said that when he began to do that he did not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. And, he said that when he got to handling the Scripture he was impressed more and more with the power of the Bible. And then, he said something that I thought was wonderful. He said, trying to write his translation of the Scriptures was like trying to rewire a house without pulling the main switch. That’s the power that he said was in the Word of God.

And then, he says, in verse 7, *“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7). Now, the word *sure* has the idea of a foundation. Now, dear friend, when you stand on the Word of God, you’re not walking on eggshells and Jell-o. There is beneath you a foundation rock that is absolutely sure. It is so sure it makes wise the simple. You see, you don’t have to be one of the intellectual high muckety-mucks to know the Word of God. One of the things I love about the Bible is that God takes the Bible and He opens it up to people.

In my ministry I have visited the homes of people who never completed grammar school, I have visited the homes of people who could hardly read, but they love the book. They had underscored the book. Where is Joyce today? Joyce, did you come today? There she is. Joyce, glad you didn’t skip, honey. It would be embarrassing. She never does. But, you remember the Gannons, Mr. and Mrs. Gannon that we used to visit there in Fort Pierce? The old couple. They just came to my mind just a second ago. I would go and visit the Gannons. I would sit in their home and listen to those people as they would expound to me the Scriptures. I mean, completely unlettered. And, I thought it was incredible the knowledge that these people had of the Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ. The law of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. These are people that the people of this world would call simple. But, they had, Brother Bob, an incredible wisdom.

You know, the Bible says, *“Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes”* (Matthew 11:25). Hasn’t He? And, the Bible says that the way of the Lord is so plain that *“a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein”* (Isaiah 35:8). That means a stranger without good sense can find his way on the Bible road.

And then, he goes on to say, in verse 8, *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart”* (Psalm 19:8). Now, the word *right* means, “never lead you astray”—“never lead you astray.” It is right. The word *right* actually means, “to cut a straight line.” That is, when God says something—God says, “Do this”—just do it. Just do it. And,

when you do it, you're going to find out that is the secret of joy.

Some people have the idea that if you follow the Word of God it's going to put you in straightjacket and take away all your joy. But, that's not what this says. It says, "*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.*" There is joy in keeping the Word of God. And, the Bible has been a pillow that the saints have put their head upon and pillowed their souls through all the years of misery and heartache that come to humankind. They found joy and solace in the Word of God.

And then, he says, "*The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes*" (Psalm 19:8). Do you see that? In verse 8, the word *pure* means, "without any admixture." That means, "without any alloy." It means that you don't have to worry about part of it being good and part of it not being good.

Now, the more liberal brethren tell us that, "Sure the Bible is inspired in spots." And, these fellows think they're inspired to spot the spots. But, dear friend, it is not inspired in spots. It is inspired in totality. All of it is the Word of God. I was reading recently that there are more than 6,000 promises in the Word of God, and not one of them has ever or will ever be broken. They're *yea* and *amen* in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

And then, in verse 9, "*The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever*" (Psalm 19:9). Do you know what the word *clean* means? It has no seeds of corruption in it. It has no flaws and therefore the Bible calls it "the incorruptible Word of God, which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). The Scriptures are never out of date. They apply to every age and every circumstance. And, they never need to be revised. Take any other of old ancient piece of literature of thousands of years of age, and see how it applies to this modern twentieth century. I'm preaching tonight in this congregation to medical doctors and psychiatrists. I'm preaching tonight to lawyers and business entrepreneurs. I'm preaching tonight to professors right here, intelligent people, and yet this book applies to these people. I'm preaching to people in the twentieth century in the time of the computer, and space travel, and fiber optics, and all of the modern things, and yet it makes no difference, friend: it is still the sweet Word of God. Isn't that great? It just endures forever. It is always fresh.

I heard about a Christian who had been to so many business meetings and was doing so much, like I get some time, going from meeting to meeting. Awhile back, I was so tired. I had preached all day long. I had gone from one meeting to another. And, a man said, "I just have to see you"—"I just have to see you." I said, "Well, fine, come into my office and sit down." He had a problem. I had been dictating letters all day long. All day long I had been dictating letters, and, you know, I would just end a letter, "In Jesus' name, Adrian Rogers." And, this man said, "Would you help me?" I helped him, and I said, "Now, let's pray." He bowed his head, and I prayed for him. And, I closed my

prayer, “In Jesus’ name, Adrian Rogers.” And, I thought, “Dear God, how addled can one man be?” Of course, the Lord already knew who I was. But, I kind of feel like the preacher who had read the Scriptures, and after he read the Scriptures, he said, “If there are no additions or corrections, the Scriptures stand approved as read.”

Now, friend, I want you to know that they do stand approved without any additions or corrections. You see, the Word of the Lord is clean and endureth forever.

B. The Value of the Scriptures

Those are the virtues of the Scriptures. And, following on the virtues of the Scriptures, he speaks of the value of the Scriptures.

1. They Are Precious

Look now at verse 10. He says they are precious: “*More to be desired are they than gold*” (Psalm 19:10). Pause, Adrian, and ask your congregation a question: How many people believe that? Ask them, Adrian, to raise their hands. Raise your hands if you believe that. It is more to be desired than gold. All right, Christians put them up there. Now, how many of us preach the Scriptures as if we were gathering gold? How many of you believe everything you read in the newspaper? Let me see your hands. Next question: How many spend more time with the newspaper than you do with the Word of God? Something you say, you believe every word of. How many of us spend more time gathering gold? More emphasis than we do permeating our lives with the Word of God? Precious, more desirable than much fine gold.

To a true believer, the Word of God is precious. I tell you, it’s precious to me. I tried to think just a few moments ago, “Adrian, what would your life be like if you didn’t know the Bible?” I can’t even imagine it. I cannot even imagine what my life would be like without the Word of God. How precious is the Bible!

2. They Are Protective

Not only are they precious, but they’re protective. You want to stay out of trouble? Look, if you will, in verse 11: “*Moreover by them is thy servant warned*” (Psalm 19:11). The way to stay out of mischief and the way to stay out of trouble is to take heed to God’s Word. And, prevention is better than cure. The Word of God will keep you from many hurts and harms if you only bathe your soul in its truth every day.

3. They Are Profitable

Not only precious, verse 10; protective, verse 11; but profitable, verse 11. Look: “*And in keeping of them there is great reward*” (Psalm 19:11). What fools we are if we don’t take the Word of God in our hand, open it, and read it! But now, wait a minute. That’s still not enough. I said there’s the Word of God in the heavens. That is the confirming Word, that God exists. But, we need more than that. We need the convicting Word in our hand. But, now wait a moment. Read with me in verse 12, we need the cleansing word in our

heart. Here's the way the focus tightens. Notice how it ends, the next three verses: *"Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.* Now here it is: *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer"* (Psalm 19:12–14). Oh, you see it in Psalm 19:14! It says, *"the meditation of my heart."* That's the Word in my heart. That, my dear friend, is how you get to know God personally.

III. God's Word in Your Heart

It's not enough to have the Word in the heavens. It's not enough to even have God's Word in your hand. Somehow, the God who made the heavens and wrote the Bible has to get down into your heart. And, how does that come?

A. The Conviction of the Heart

Well, first of all, there must be the conviction of the heart. Look at verse 12: *"Who can understand his errors?"* (Psalm 19:12). You see, dear friend, before you can know God, you've got to let the Word of God come in and lay open your heart. *"Who can understand his errors?"* Look. Continue to read there in verse 12: *"Cleanse thou me from secret faults"* (Psalm 19:12).

What is the next word in the King James? *Faults*. Do you know what they say is beneath us right here? The New Madrid Fault. You see it? I don't see it. Walk out and see if you see the New Madrid Fault. You can't see it. Why? Because it's underground. It's a secret fault.

Dear friend, did you know why some people have moral earthquakes? They're not aware of secret faults. So, they're strutting around, saying, "I'm okay; you're okay." *"Who can understand his errors?"* You know, I hear people say, "If I know my heart..." I'm guilty of saying that. I say that sometimes: "Well, if I know my heart..." Truth of the matter is, I don't know my heart. And, you don't know your heart. The Bible says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"* (Jeremiah 17:9). And, how can a deceitful heart discern a deceitful heart? It's impossible.

B. The Cleansing of the Heart

You see, the Word of God—there must be the conviction of the heart. And then, not only is there the conviction of the heart; then comes the cleansing of the heart. Look in verse 12, *"...cleanse thou me from secret faults"* (Psalm 19:12). You see, the only way you can know it is God's Word. That's the conviction that comes from the Word. Then, there comes the cleansing. And, what is the cleansing agent that we find in the Word of God? The blood of Jesus, taught from Genesis to Revelation, some way, somehow.

First John 1:7 says, *“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

C. The Control of the Heart

Now, after there is that conviction of the heart, and there is that cleansing of the heart, then there comes that control of the heart. It’s beautiful. Look in verse 13 now: *“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins”* (Psalm 19:13). It’s not enough just simply that you be cleansed. Dear friends, you need to be controlled. Do know what presumptuous sins are? That is the sin that you willfully and deliberately enter into. It’s the most dangerous kind of sin. You ought to get up every day and pray it, whether you use these words or not: “Oh, God, keep me, keep me, keep me.” Dear friend, the way to live victoriously is linked with prayer, where you say, “God, keep my heart from presumptuous sin, and let them not have dominion over me.” When sin has dominion over you, you are a miserable person.

I heard about a man one time who was in a battle. He said to his commander, “I have taken a prisoner.” The commander said, “That’s wonderful. Bring him with you.” He said, “Well, he won’t come.” “Well,” he said, “you leave him, and you come.” He said, “He won’t let me go.” I wonder who has taken who.

We talk about having victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to understand, dear friend, that through God’s Word, the Holy Word of God in our hearts as we pray, presumptuous sins are held back, and sin does not have dominion over us.

D. The Communion of the Heart

Now, watch. Verse 12, you have the conviction of the heart. And then, in verse 13, you have the cleansing of the heart. Then, in verse 14, you have the control of the heart. And then, in verse 15—and here’s the bottom line of this whole nineteenth Psalm—you have the communion of the heart: *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:15). This is knowing God at the highest level. There is that inward communion: *“the meditation of my heart.”* There is that outward accessibility. *“The words of my mouth”*: because you know God, and you know Him personally.

Conclusion

I want to tell you a story, and then I will be finished. I want to show you how this works. When I was in seminary, I met a man whose name was Nikolai Alexandrenko. Nikolai Alexandrenko was a Russian. He was a commander in the Russian army in World War II. He was a paratrooper. He was an atheist. He was raised an atheist, one of those that Madalyn Murray O’Hair was talking about. He was a very intelligent man. He had been taught that there was no God; to hate the idea of God.

The Germans were moving on Russia. This man and his troops parachuted right down to the front lines by the Dnieper River. And, there he was fighting, and he felt a flash of pain in his left leg. And, he reached down and felt that warm blood. He knew he had been wounded. He knew that he couldn't run. He saw the Germans coming. He had been taught that suicide was better than being captured. So, he took his gun and turned it around and put it to his temple—his long rifle. And then, he turned away from that instinctively. He knew that was wrong. He put up his hands and surrendered.

They took my friend, Nikolai, and they put him on a German tank, and they carried him away with 19 others that they had captured. And then, they put him on a train to take him back to Germany as a prisoner of war. The Russians came and bombed that train with their own soldiers on it. But, somehow he survived. And, when he got there in Germany, they put him in a prisoner of war camp, and they fed him grass soup. And, he almost starved to death. Hundreds of his fellow prisoners starved to death in the concentration camp, in that prisoner of war camp.

He was still hating God. He was still hating the idea of God, not believing in God. In 1945, the war ended. They told him, "Now, you can go back to Russia." My friend Nikolai said, "I don't want to go back to Russia. They might learn that I surrendered. I might end up in Siberia. I was a commander. I don't want to go back to Russia." They said, "You can stay here, then, in a displaced persons camp." Now Nikolai was an intelligent man, and he had often thought about the idea of God, whether God existed. He couldn't figure out how that everything could be here just by happenstance; or, just by whatever. But, he had been taught that there was no God.

My friend Nikolai was in a cold barracks building on this displaced persons camp. It was bitterly cold. There was a little potbelly stove there. And, he was trying to get a fire started, and somebody jammed so many papers in the stove that it wouldn't burn, it couldn't get any draft. And so, he's pulling some of this dirty scrap paper out. And, as he pulls this paper out, he pulls out the remains of a gospel tract out with some Scripture on it. He had never read the Scripture before. But, he read the scripture, Revelation 3:20: "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.*" And, that text said that it was God knocking at the heart's door. Then, he read another scripture. This one was Matthew 11:28: "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

A Russian paratrooper looking at the Word of God, he had the Word of God in his hand. He'd already thought of the Word of God in the heavens. He did something that he never thought that he would do. But, he prayed. He said, "God, if You exist, if this is Your word, if You are standing at my heart's door and knocking; God, if You want to give me rest, speak to me, God." And, he said that God just flooded him with his presence, as if to say, "My child, I am here." Nikolai said, "I had learned not to trust. I did not cry as a child when my mother died." He said, "I did not cry as a Russian

paratrooper.” He said, “I did not cry when I was shot in the leg.” He said, “I did not cry in that prison camp as I saw people starving and dying ’round about me, eating grass soup.” He said, “I did not cry as an isolated displaced person.” But, he said, “Oh, God, if you are there, reveal Yourself.” And, he said, “I felt the presence of God, and for the first time in my life, as a grown man, the tears began to flow.”

He said, “I knew that He was there and that He loved me, but I didn’t know what to do, but,” he said, “by the providence of God, He led me to a fellow Russian soldier who had found Christ. He gave me a Bible and took me to a little Baptist church. There, they told me of Jesus, and I was saved.” And now today, he is a Bible professor in one of our Baptist colleges here in the South, a man I went to school with, a Russian paratrooper.

Now, my dear friends, that’s the way God works. And, in that story you have all three of these elements. First of all, Nikolai saw the Word of God in the heavens. Then, by the grace of God, he had the Word of God in his hands: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” And then, he had the Word of God in his heart, as he received Jesus Christ.

I’ve got news for you, Madalyn. You can know God personally. Hallelujah, amen!

How You Can Know God Personally

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 28, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 19

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

PSALMS 19:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Convincing Word of God in the Heavens
 - A. The Heavens Declare the Glory of God
 - B. The Heavens Declare God’s Greatness
 - C. The Heavens Declare the God’s Goodness
- II. The Converting Word of God in the Hand
 - A. The Virtue of the Scripture
 - 1. The Scripture Is Perfect
 - 2. The Scripture Is Sure
 - 3. The Scripture Is Right
 - 4. The Scripture Is Pure
 - 5. The Scripture Is Enduring
 - B. The Value of the Scripture
 - 1. The Scripture Is Precious
 - 2. The Scripture Is Protective
 - 3. The Scripture Is Profitable
- III. The Convicting Word of God in the Heart
 - A. The Conviction of the Spirit
 - B. The Cleansing of the Spirit
 - C. The Control of the Spirit
 - D. The Communion of the Spirit

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding the Book of Psalms—that’s about the middle book in the Bible—and find the nineteenth chapter of the nineteenth Psalm. And, when you’ve found it, look up here.

Some time ago, somebody handed me a tract. That tract was distributed by the American Atheist Association. They are handing out tracts also. And, the title of the tract

was “An Invitation to the Intellectual Elite.” So, I thought I would see if I was in that group. And so, I read it, and here’s what it said: “If you accept, number one, that God is a myth, humankind’s future is in its own hands. Secondly, prayers are what you say to yourself. Success in life depends upon human effort. Thirdly, humans are a part of nature and developed in it. What purpose there is in life, humans make.” Next, “When you do, your life is over forever. Only your ideas can survive.” Next, “The church and clergy are in business for themselves. They have no more special knowledge about life than the average person.” Next, “Humankind is responsible for what it does. There are no sins. Crimes cannot be forgiven by religious rites, holy water, or doing penance.” Next, “The time to live is now. The place to live is here. And, the way to be happy is to make yourselves and others happy.” And then, it says, “If you believe that, you’re an atheist.” May I say, “I don’t believe it.” I know, but I must not be very intellectual, but according to them.

Let me say this: You can be an intellectual and believe in God, did you know that? You certainly can be. And, I want to say something else. You need not be an intellectual to believe in God. “God hath hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes” (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21).

Now, somebody says, “Well, pastor, I know some intellectuals who believe in God.” Fine! I know some intellectuals who don’t. You say, “Well, pastor, I know some people who are not very bright who believe in God.” I know some people who are not very bright who don’t believe in God. I mean, ladies and gentlemen, it’s really not a matter of your grey matter. You don’t come to God headfirst; you come to God heart-first. “And God hath hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and God hath revealed them unto babes.”

Now, I want to tell you today how you can know God personally. You don’t have to guess about it. You can know Him personally. And, that’s so very important. You see, because *to know Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to obey Him. And, to obey Him is to be blessed.*

Now, how can you know God? Well, the nineteenth Psalm gives us three ways in which God speaks to us. And, you don’t have to guess about it. There can be no stutter, no stammer, no apology, no equivocation. You can know God personally, intimately, assuredly. You can say, as this young man sang, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Now here are the three things. Here are the three ways that God speaks to you.

I. The Convincing Word of God in the Heavens

First of all, there is the convincing Word of God in the heavens. Look, if you will, here in this Psalm: “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.*”

There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth”—that is, the sun’s going forth—“is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof” (Psalm 19:6).

Now, what he’s talking about now is God’s Word in the heavens, God’s convincing Word in the heavens. As you look up into the starry night, as you see the vast universe that Almighty God has created, that alone is enough to confirm what the Bible has said. *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”* (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). For out of nothing, nothing comes.

What do the heavens declare?

A. The Heavens Declare the Glory of God

First of all, the glory of God. Look in verse 1: *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1). Go out some night, some starry night, and just look upward at that candelabra in the sky and think about all of that. Think of the glory that is displayed there.

Some time ago, Joyce and I took a vacation down to a little island in the Caribbean, a small little island. There were no automobiles on the island. And, we stayed in a little cabin that had no air conditioning, and right there by the water’s edge. And, there was a wooden dock, a wharf—nothing to do. We made a big jigsaw puzzle—took us all week to do that. We walked the beach, and in order to go down to the little village there was a little boat out there. You had to take the little boat. And, the boat came with the cottage. But, for recreation, Joyce and I would go out and lie down on our backs on that little wharf, that little dock, at nighttime, and talk to one another, and look straight up into the stars—and down in the Caribbean, the sky, like the water, crystal clear. And, to see those stars up there, millions and millions of them, just to lie on your back and look at those stars, would just fill you with awe.

You know, we’ve forgotten to look up, haven’t we? We’re so busy running around. Some night, find a clear night and just go out and look up there and see what God has made. *“The heavens declare the glory of God,”* amen? You’re going to see God’s glory.

B. The Heavens Declare God’s Greatness

And, when you see God’s glory, you’re going to see God’s greatness. Look again in this Psalm, if you will: *“And the firmament sheweth his handiwork”* (Psalm 19:1). Once you see the glory, you say, “Who did that?” God did that. That is God’s handiwork. What great power is demonstrated in creation! You don’t have to be a Ph.D. to know that out of nothing, nothing comes.

A great and elegant black preacher, eloquent also, said one time, “God stepped from behind the curtain of nowhere and stood upon the platform of nothing and spoke a world into existence.” I love that.

You know, man can’t create anything. No man has ever created one thing. We talk about human beings with creativity. All you can do is re-arrange what God has already created. God created in one great act everything. People are looking for the big bang; they’d better be trying to find out who is behind the whole thing.

Light travels—I’m always impressed with the speed of light—186,282 per miles per second—per second! How fast is that? Well, if you were going to hijack a light beam and go to the moon, you’re at the moon in two seconds—you’re at the moon. But, you have to travel at the speed of light—186,282 miles per second—four and one-half years to get to the nearest star—the nearest star. And, folks, to travel on out to the rim of our known universe, traveling at the speed of light, you would travel for ten billion years. To the moon in two seconds. Ten billion years and you still have not reached the edge of this vast universe. Who made all of that? I want to tell you that God made it.

Think not only about the vastness of this world, but think about the intricacies of this world. The smallest unit of human life is the cell. There are so many cells in the human body—three billion of them in your body. Some of us have more than others, but let’s take an average person—three billion of these cells. And, Paul Doty of Harvard University said that one of these cells, just one, is more complicated than New York City. Think of everything that’s happening in just one of those cells. Three billion of them are in your body.

Whether you look inward, whether you look outward, whether you see the vastness or the minuteness of this creation: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.”*

People talk about the laws of nature. There are no laws of nature. They are God’s laws that nature obeys. And, science only discovers what God has already put there. That’s all. All of this Internet technology was there for people to discover, but they didn’t create it. Nobody created that—Mr. Gore, or anybody else. It was there, and all they do is just discover what is already there. They are no more capable of creating that than Columbus was capable of creating North America. He just found what was already there.

This is the handiwork of Almighty God. Therefore, a person has no excuse whatsoever for not believing in God. And, God’s Word says it clearly and crisply. Romans chapter 1, verses 19 and 20: *“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:19–

20).

Do you think, as this atheist tract says, that not to believe in God is a sign of intelligence? May I tell you that 90 percent of all astronomers believe in God—90 percent? That's higher than any other profession—90 percent. Why? "*The heavens declare the glory of God.*" They look out. They can say, "This is impossible apart from a Creator." It's not a sign of intelligence not to believe in God.

Most of the great philosophers believed in God. As a matter of fact, historians tell us there really have been only 54 truly great philosophers, and most of them believed in God. Aristotle believed in God. Plato believed in God. Socrates believes in God. Forty of the 54 believed in God. The other 14 who did not believe in God, every one of them hated their father. It's a very interesting thing. Every one of them hated their father.

Charles Darwin—his father was six feet tall—six feet, three inches tall. He weighed 365 pounds. And, Green Bay would have liked to have had him. He was a huge man. He was a medical doctor. Charles Darwin said he had huge, hairy hands, and when he spoke, his voice was a roar. Darwin said, "My father could not stand to be opposed. If opposed, he would roar at me and had the gift of always making people do just what he wanted them to do."

Charles Darwin's mother died when he was eight. He could not remember anything about his mother—nothing. He could remember events that happened when he was four, five, and six years of age, but he could not remember when he wrote in his diary anything about his mother. But, he remembered the oppressive ways of his father. He did write this one thing in his diary: "My father was a doctor and healed others, but he let my mother die." He had an antipathy, a hatred, for his father.

And, Charles Darwin was not a bright student. As a matter of fact, he failed in school. His father pushed him on through in school and tried to make a doctor out of him. When he went in for his first autopsy, he fainted, and said, "I don't want to be a doctor." So then, his father tried to make a preacher out of him, put him in theological school. He hated it. He had no desire to preach. Finally, they got somebody to tutor him who happened to be a biologist. And, there he found that he had a penchant for biology. He couldn't find peace anywhere, had no confidence in God or his father. He took a trip upon that ship called *The Beagle* and went to the Andes Mountains, and Brazil, and Galapagos. And, he began to make sketches and drawings. And, out of his fevered brain and some readings, he got the idea of evolution. His heart was filled with hate, hating God and hating everybody else. And, finally, he wrote that book, *The Descent of Man* and *The Origin of the Species*. He was a philosopher. He had other ideas about creation.

There was another famous philosopher. His name was Friedrich Nietzsche. He was also the son of a dogmatic preacher. And, Nietzsche hated his father. And, he learned

to hate God, and he hated the idea of God. What some people don't know is Nietzsche was a sexual pervert. He died of syphilis. And, he had the idea also of the survival of the fittest. He wrote a book based on the idea of "Man and Superman." He developed the idea of a superior race. He was a true racist. You know who got hold of Nietzsche's work? Hitler. Hitler read both Darwin and Nietzsche, and Hitler wrote his book *Mein Kampf*, where he gave his philosophies. And, here's what Hitler said. You talk about racism. "I have a right to eliminate an inferior race that breeds like vermin." He's speaking of the Jews. Hitler and Stalin, students of Darwin and Nietzsche and Karl Marx, were both atheists. They learned from Darwin and Nietzsche. Hitler and Stalin together put to death 57 million people—57 million.

Have you ever heard anybody say, "Well, it's all these religious wars that are causing so much problem in the world"—religious wars, religious wars? You'll hear that. That's the mantra of people today, saying it is religion that puts people to death. Did you know from the dawn of recorded history to this time, there have been about 3 million people who have been killed in religious wars? And, I'm sorry for any one of them. But, this includes wars perpetrated or participated in by Muslims and Hindus and the oriental religions as well as some who might call themselves Christian—about 3 million. Now, if you would take the conflicts of those who were killed in wars that involved Christians, you'd narrow that down to 1.8 million. If you were to take the wars that involved what we would call Bible-believing, evangelical Christians, you would drop that down, friend, to about 180,000. Hitler and Stalin, in 50 years—not 6,000 years, but in 50 years—killed 57 million on the philosophy of atheism, that there is no God, because if there is no God, there's no real, intrinsic value to human life, and there is no right, and there is no wrong.

C. The Heavens Declare the God's Goodness

The heavens declare the glory of God. The heavens declare the greatness of God. And, the heavens declare the goodness of God. Look, if you will again, in chapter 19, verse 2: "*Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge*" (Psalm 19:2). Now, what does that mean? It means there is a fixed order in the universe: night and day, day and night. It is God who "*daily loadeth us with benefits*" (Psalm 68:19). And, His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22–23). And, this knowledge is universal. It is everywhere. Anybody any place on the face of the earth that can see the sun like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber and going across the orbit of the sky, to feel the warmth of its rays, to see it fructify and cause the earth to blossom and bloom, and to feel the gentle rain that's a part of the hydraulic action of that sun (Psalm 19:4–6), and knowing that God makes it to rain upon the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), can look up and say, "The heavens declare the glory of God, the greatness of

God, and the goodness of God.” And, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”*

II. The Converting Word of God in the Hand

Now, we see God’s convincing Word in the heavens. But, there’s another way that God speaks. Here’s the second way—and it’s God converting Word in the hand. Look up here. See what I have in my hand? I have in my hand the Word of God. Not only is God’s Word in the heavens, but God’s Word is in my hand. Oh, the marvel of the Word of God! Oh, the marvel of the Bible!

Begin now in verse 7 of this same Psalm, and look, if you will, please: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them is great reward”* (Psalm 19:7–11).

There’s the convincing Word, and there is, my friend, the converting Word—the converting Word that I hold in my hand. Look again, if you will, in verse 7 of this Psalm: *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul”* (Psalm 19:7). You cannot know God through creation alone. You can know about God, but friend, you have to have the Bible to truly know the heart and mind of God—not only what God has wrought, but what God has written. That’s the reason I love the Bible.

A. The Virtue of the Scripture

Think for a moment about the virtue of the Scripture.

1. The Scripture Is Perfect

First of all, he says, in verse 7, that, *“The law of the LORD is perfect,”*—perfect—*“converting the soul”* (Psalm 19:7). That’s the reason we believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture. Every sentence, every jot, every tittle, every syllable is put there by the mind and purpose of God. God wrote it. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God”* (2 Timothy 3:16). And, a God of truth could never inspire error.

J. B. Phillips decided he would make a translation of the Scriptures, put it in more friendly language, more understandable language than the King James Version of the Scripture, so he thought. J. B. Phillips, when he began his work, did not believe in verbal, plenary inspiration; that is, that all was verbally inspired by God. But, as he got to dealing with the Scriptures, here’s what he said. He was so impressed with the power of the Bible that he said that trying to do this was like trying to re-wire a house without pulling the main switch—just in there dealing with the power of the Scripture. *“The law*

of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.”

2. The Scripture Is Sure

Next, *“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7). It’s the foundational Word. Friend, when you understand the Bible, you have a place to stand. It is sure. It is certain. You’re not walking on eggshells and Jell-O. And, *“a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein”* (Isaiah 35:8).

3. The Scripture Is Right

Again, look in verse 8: *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart”* (Psalm 19:8). The word *right* has the idea of a straight path. The Bible will never lead you astray. Sometimes I hear people say, “Oh, it’s so hard to be a Christian.” That’s not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). This verse says that, *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.”* The saints and heroes of the ages have found joy in the Word of God, as I do continually day after day.

4. The Scripture Is Pure

And then, next, *“The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”* (Psalm 19:8). Do you see that in verse 8? When the Bible says it’s *“pure,”* that means there’s no mixture of error in the Bible. There are over 6,000 promises in the Bible, and not one of them of God’s pure Word has ever been broken.

5. The Scripture Is Enduring

Look in verse 9: *“The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever”* (Psalm 19:9). Why does the Bible live on? Because there are no seeds of corruption in the Word of God. It is the incorruptible, indestructible Word of God, which lives and abides forever. And, by the way, the Scriptures are never out of date and never inappropriate. I’ve been preaching the Scriptures now for well over four decades, and they’re as fresh to me as they’ve ever been. I’m not finding hidden flaws. I’m finding hidden beauties. I love the Word of God more today than I ever have loved the Word of God. Why? Because *“the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever.”*

B. The Value of the Scripture

But, think not only of the virtues of the Scripture; think of the value of the Scriptures.

1. The Scripture Is Precious

Look in verse 10. They’re precious. They’re more desirable *“than much fine gold”* (Psalm 19:10). I wonder how many people in this building really believe that. To a true believer, the Bible is precious indeed. And, you cannot love God without loving His Word. I say this, and I know that God is listening, and I’m thinking as I’m saying it. If you were to put all of the treasures in this world on this side, and put the Bible over here,

and say to me, “Adrian, you can have one or the other,” I wouldn’t have to think for a skinny minute—I would choose the Word of God. I mean that with all my heart—no stutter, no stammer. God is listening to me. I would not have to think about it. Greater than gold is the Word of God. Oh, they are precious indeed!

A lady visited Yosemite. She said to the guide, “I only have an hour. What should I do if I only have an hour to see Yosemite?” He said, “You what?” She said, “I’ve got an hour. What should I do?” He said, “Lady, if you want to see Yosemite and you only have an hour, I suggest you go just sit down over there by the river and cry; just cry—that’s all!” Oh, friend, the Bible is a treasure. How we ought to love it!

2. The Scripture Is Protective

And, not only are the Scriptures precious; they are protective. Look in verse 11: “*By them is thy servant warned*” (Psalm 19:11). You know, protection is far better than cure. There are so many hurts and so many harms and so many failures that you would be kept from if you would only let the Word of God lead you, if you would get up in the morning and bathe yourself in the Word of God. “*By them is thy servant warned.*” Let God turn His light on your path and say, “Walk this way,” and, “Don’t walk that way.”

3. The Scripture Is Profitable

Not only are they precious, not only are they protective; they are profitable. “*In keeping of them there is great reward*” (Psalm 19:11)—verse 11. You cheat yourself of an incredible blessing by not loving the Word of God.

III. The Convicting Word of God in the Heart

Now, what am I saying? There is God’s Word in the heavens—“*The heavens declare the glory of God.*” There is God’s Word in the hand—the Scriptures, the written Word given by inspiration of Almighty God as God speaks to us. And, we think of the virtues and the values of the Word of God. But, still, that’s not enough. There’s one more thing that we need, and that is the convicting Word of God in the heart. The Word in the heavens; the Word in the hand; but now, the Word in the heart.

Look, if you will now, in verse 12 of this same wonderful Psalm: “*Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults...*”—now, what he’s doing now is praying. He’s speaking to God—“*cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer*” (Psalm 19:12–14).

This is a prayer to the Holy Spirit. You see, we see objectively that God exists. Then, we learn from the Word of God the truths of God’s Word, the converting Word of God. But, the Holy Spirit of God must make all of this real in our heart.

A. The Conviction of the Spirit

Look in verse 12—there is the convicting Word of the Spirit: *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults”* (Psalm 19:12). Do you know why we have moral earthquakes? Because we have secret faults, and we don’t know what’s beneath the surface. And so, he’s saying, “I can’t understand this.” You see, your *“heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9), and so is mine. So, what do we need? We need the Holy Spirit of God to bring conviction of sin. And, Jesus said, concerning the Holy Spirit, *“When he is come, he will [convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8).

I can get you to nod your head that you’ve sinned, but you’ll never understand the depth of your sin, nor will you ever truly be convicted of that sin—you’ll only agree, perhaps—but, when the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you, that’s the convicting Word of God. That’s the reason this morning before I walked out here I got on my knees and prayed.

Friend, God wants to speak to your heart today. Don’t you let your heart get hard. I preached to some people. It’s like pouring water on a rock: nothing gets in. And, you can believe intellectually in God, and you can go to Hell with a Bible under your arm, unless you let, my precious Friend, the Word of God come into your heart. There is the convicting Word of the heart.

I hear people say, “Well, if I know my heart, *ta-da-ta-da-da*.” Come up close. I want to tell you something. You don’t know your heart. Only God knows your heart. Your heart is *“deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9). And, a deceitful heart can never discern a deceitful heart.

B. The Cleansing of the Spirit

And so, in verse 12, there’s the convicting Word of the Spirit. And then, in verse 12, there’s the cleansing Word of the Spirit. Thank God for that. Listen: *“Cleanse thou me from secret faults”*— *“Cleanse thou me from secret faults”* (Psalm 19:12). You cannot know God personally and intimately if there’s sin in your heart and in your life. And, how does the Holy Spirit cleanse? Through the atoning blood. First John 1:9: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

C. The Control of the Spirit

The conviction of the Spirit. The cleansing of the Spirit. And then, that’s not enough. Look again in verse 13. There is the control of the Spirit: *“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression”* (Psalm 19:13). You see how the Holy Spirit works? First, there’s conviction. Then, there’s cleansing. But, that’s not

enough. Then, there's the control. "Keep me, Lord, from presumptuous sins." Two things you'd better always be cognizant of: the possibility of secret faults, and the danger of presumptuous sins. It's one thing to slip into sin; it's another thing to stumble into sin. But, friend, pray God that He will keep you from presumptuous sin. That is where you say, "I know this is wrong, but..." You are in grave danger when you do that. "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins."

D. The Communion of the Spirit

Now, this is God's Word. This is the convicting Word now in the heart. Where there is the conviction of sin, there's the cleansing of sin; there is the control from sin; there's the control of the Spirit. And, do you know what leads to? This is the bottom line. The communion of the Spirit. Look, if you will now, in verse 14: "*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer*" (Psalm 19:14). That's what it's all about.

Got put His Word in the heavens. You hold His Word in your hand. God sends His Word into your heart. Why? That you might walk with Him and talk with Him and the meditation of your heart would be acceptable in His sight. How sweet, how wonderful that is!

I received a letter just recently. I want to share it with you, and I'm finished. One of the reasons I'm so grateful for this television ministry and what it does, because it reaches so many people that we could not reach otherwise. It's a recent letter: "Dear Pastor Rogers, I had to write to let you know what effect your ministry has had on my life. Many times I sat and watched your program and thought what you said was stupid, how you expressed Christ was a joke. I laughed at your God by ignoring Him. He wasn't really there. I was a Satanist, as well as a part of the Nazi movement. As bad as it sounds, Christians were nothing more than a lower life form to myself and my friends. I didn't need your God. I sold my soul to the devil, and I signed a pact with my own blood. And, after doing so, I read the small print. If I tried to get out of the group, I could be killed. I remembered your prayer line and your church. I called the number. Someone prayed with me, and I received Christ. I got a Bible and read it and re-read it. God saved me. Why would He do that? Because I was so evil and hurt Him so badly. I had been living together with my boyfriend. He saw the change in me too. He got saved, and we finally got married. We both love the Lord so much, because we can see the love of the Lord through your church. Jesus can save anyone. He saved me. Thanks for your prayer line and your church and your television ministry."

That's what I'm talking about, friend. "*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psalm 19:7). And, you say, "Well, I'm no Satanist, Pastor Rogers. I haven't signed a pact with the devil in my blood." Friend, it's not the amount of sin that damns us; it's

the fact of sin. More people drown in 9 feet of water than drown in 90 feet of water. If you're a sinner, you're a sinner, and the Bible says, "*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). But, no matter how deep your sin, how dark your sin, "*the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.*"

Conclusion

God has put His Word in the heavens. God has put His Word in our hands. And, God has put His Word in our hearts. Can an intellectual believe in God? You'd better believe it! Do you have to be an intellectual to believe in God? Not at all! God will show it to a child. And, therefore, you need to lay your intellectual pride in the dust and just say, 'Lord, speak to me.' And, when He does, obey Him. And, don't wait till you have it all figured out, because you'll wake up in Hell and you still won't have it all figured out. You come to Jesus just as you are and trust Him to save you.

Three Ways That You Can Know God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 26, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 19:1–14

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

PSALMS 19:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. God’s Word in the Sky
 - A. The Heavens Speak of God’s Person
 - B. The Heavens Speak of God’s Power
 - C. The Heavens Speak of God’s Purpose
 - D. The Heavens Speak of God’s Presence
- II. God’s Word in the Scripture
 - A. The Scriptures Are Perfect
 - B. The Scriptures Are Plain
 - C. The Scriptures Are Pleasing
 - D. The Scriptures Are Pure
 - E. The Scriptures Are Permanent
 - F. The Scriptures Are Protective
 - G. The Scriptures Are Profitable
- III. God’s Word in the Spirit
 - A. The Conviction of the Spirit
 - B. The Cleansing of the Spirit
 - C. The Control of the Spirit
 - D. The Communion of the Spirit

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word tonight and turn to Psalm 19—the nineteenth Psalm. Would you do that? I want to talk to you about how to know God better—or, really, “Three Ways That You Can Know God,” actually, “How I Know That God Exists, and How I Know That I Know.” Now, if you’re plagued with doubt tonight, I want you to get this Bible in your hand and open it up. The most important thing, my friend, is to know God—not to know about God, but to know God.

Now, let me tell you this: If you truly know the God of this Bible, you will love Him. To know Him is to love Him. Now, let me say something else: If you truly love Him, you will trust Him, because you cannot truly trust someone that you do not love. If you love somebody and know they love you, then you can trust them. Now, listen. To know God is to love Him. To love Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to obey Him. The reason that you don't obey Him is because you probably do not trust Him.

Let's take the matter of tithing. You don't mind, do you, if I take the matter of tithing? The Bible says, "*Bring...tithes into the storehouse...and prove me now herewith saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it*" (Malachi 3:10). Well, hey, if you really believe that, you'd tithe. Am I wrong about that? No, I'm not wrong. If you really believe that, you would tithe.

So, if you trust Him, you obey Him. Now, if you obey Him, you'll be blessed. Isn't it very simple? To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to be blessed. Don't you want to be blessed? I want to be blessed. Now, it all begins with knowing God. And, Psalm 19 is a wonderful Psalm that talks about how to know God. And, God has revealed Himself to you in three mighty, glorious ways.

I. God's Word in the Sky

First of all, God has revealed Himself to you in what we call *creation*. I want to call that His Word in the sky. Notice here in Psalm 19—I begin in verse 1: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them*"—that is, "in the heavens"—"*hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth*"—that is, "the going forth of the sun"—"*is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof*" (Psalm 19:1–6).

Now, what does David say here? I don't know when David wrote this Psalm: maybe as a little shepherd boy lying flat on his back, looking up into the starry Judean sky; maybe as a king walking on the palace rooftop; maybe one night out on a battlefield David looked up and saw the skies, that candelabra in the black velvet of Heaven, and he saw those stars, and he said, "*The heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1). And, by the inspiration of God, he wrote down this wonderful sonnet, this poem, we have here tonight. He saw God in the heavens.

Somebody actually said, "There are three Heavens: there's the Heaven where God

lives, and then there's the Heaven where the stars are—the Bible calls those the *hosts of Heaven*—and then there's the atmosphere where birds fly.” Three Heavens: the first Heaven—where the birds fly; the second Heaven—where the stars are; the third Heaven—the abode of God. The first Heaven we see by day. The second Heaven we see by night, and the third Heaven we see by faith. All three of these wonderful Heavens declare the glory of God. And, what do they tell us?

A. **The Heavens Speak of God's Person**

Well, first of all, they tell us of God's person—that God exists. The *glory* means, “the outshining” of God. All of God's creation just speaks of God's existence. You can't have a creation without having a Creator. I mean, folks, you really don't have to be too intelligent to figure out that out of nothing, nothing comes. Everything has to have a beginning, except the one self-existent God who created everything, who Himself is created of nothing.

A black preacher one time preached, and I heard him preach, and he said that, “God stepped from behind the curtain of nowhere onto the platform of nothing and spoke a world into existence.” I like that. God created the heavens and the earth. I was reading years ago about some of Napoleon's soldiers, and they were arguing whether or not God existed. And, some were saying that God existed, and others were saying God didn't exist. And, Napoleon, who was not particularly a spiritual man, pointed to the heavens and to the stars, and he said, “Gentlemen, before you deny the fact of God, you'll have to get rid of those.” Now, Napoleon may not have been a spiritual man, but certainly he was no fool. Look. The heavens declare God's person.

B. **The Heavens Speak of God's Power**

And, the heavens declare God's power. Look at this verse again: “*The firmament sheweth his handywork*” (Psalm 19:1). What mighty power is demonstrated in this universe! Now, men can't create anything. All men can do is rearrange what God has already created. Every now and then, I read some article about some scientist who created life in his laboratory. He's put together amino acids and gotten some lifelike substances, but he hasn't created anything; he's just rearranged things.

Suppose my father is a master architect and builds magnificent buildings. I study what my father has done, and then I take my father's materials, and my father's tools, and my father's blueprints, and I build a chicken coop, and then I say, “You see that chicken coop? It proves my father doesn't exist.” Now, that's what some of these folks are doing: just taking God's materials and God's plans and everything, and rearranging them a little bit. But, man can't create anything. All he can do is work with what God has already created.

You think of this: the speed of light. And, it will help remind you of the size of this

mighty, mighty universe. Light travels at 136,282 miles per second. Now, folks, that's moving on. Let me just tell you how fast that is. Light moves from Earth past the moon in two seconds. That's how fast it is. But, traveling at that speed, light still has to travel four and one-half years to get to the nearest star. But, traveling at a 186,282 miles a second, it would travel for 10 billion years and still not reach the realm of the known universe. And, what lies on the other side of that only God knows. Out in the fathomless infinite reaches of space, light just travels and travels.

C. The Heavens Speak of God's Purpose

You see, the heavens speak of God's person. The heavens speak of God's power. And then, they speak of God's purpose. Look in verse 2, if you will: *"Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge"* (Psalm 19:2). Now, what does that tell us? That tells us that our universe is a universe of order. Night follows day, and day follows night. And, God has put all of the planets there in orbit. God has put our earth revolving around our sun, spinning on its axis that causes night and day and day and night. All of it works like perfect machinery. See, Aristotle, a very brilliant man, said, "The beauty, the order, and the harmony of the universe is but an expression of the will of God." Again, I hear the scientists, and they're talking about the laws of nature—the laws of nature. Friend, *there are no laws of nature; they are the laws of God that nature obeys.*

D. The Heavens Speak of God's Presence

And so, the heavens declare the person of God. The heavens declare the power of God. The heavens declare the purpose of God. And, the heavens declare the presence of God. Notice in verse 3: *"There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard"* (Psalm 19:3). Everywhere these heavens are declaring the very presence of God. Notice in verse 4: *"Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them"—in the heavens—"hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof"* (Psalm 19:4–6). What does this tell us? It tells us that the knowledge of God is everywhere. It is a universal language. And, therefore, if a man doesn't believe in God, he has no excuse.

Romans chapter 1, verse 19, picks up this theme, and it says they are without excuse, *"because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For visible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made"* (Romans 1:19–20). A man is a fool who says there is no God. *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"* (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). The entire universe has this stamp on it: "Made by God." The light

and the warmth of the sun that is in the heavens speak of the presence of God.

Last night I went out with some friends. We all went to Dr. Vincent's house—Bob Vincent's beautiful ranch house—for a wonderful dinner. It was such a wonderful time. And, we set on his back porch and ate some peach ice cream and looked out at the sunset over those rolling hills and those cattle coming home and watched that sunset. It was so beautiful—just so beautiful. You know, wouldn't you hate to be an atheist and not have anyone to thank for a sunset like that? I mean, not to be able to say, "Thank You, God, for the beauty that is revealed." Oh, "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*" (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1).

II. God's Word in the Scripture

Now, God's Word is in the skies. That's one way you can know of God. But, do you know, from the God who reveals Himself in the skies—well, He's a God of power, He's omnipotent, He's everlasting and all of that, but that's not enough—that's not enough. There's another way that you have to know God: not only God's Word in the sky, but God's Word in the Scripture.

A. The Scriptures Are Perfect

Now, notice what David continues to say now in verse 7: he begins to talk about the Scripture, and he says, "*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psalm 19:7). And, that's the first thing he tells us about Holy Scripture—is that the Scripture is perfect. I believe David believed, as I believe, in the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. Jesus taught that God gave the Scriptures by inspiration. And, every syllable, every jot, every tittle, every sentence, every pen stroke, is put there by the mind and the purpose of God. "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God*" (2 Timothy 3:16), and God makes no mistakes, so the law of the Lord is perfect. And, it converts the soul.

Friend, listen. You can't be saved by studying the stars. Thank God the presence of God is revealed by the skies. Oh, but the grace of God is revealed by the Scriptures. The skies reveal the glory of God. The Scripture reveals the grace of God. "*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul*" (Psalm 19:7). Oh, my friend, we are "*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth*" (1 Peter 1:23).

You see, the Word of God is alive. J. B. Phillips translated the Scripture. Phillips' translation is very interesting—a very good translation, beautiful in many ways—and he has some wonderful insights. But, by his own testimony he said that when he started translating the Scripture, he did not believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Scripture. He was one of these scholars who just didn't take the Bible as perfect. But, he said, as he continued to handle the Scriptures and see the power in the Word of

God, it changed him to believe in verbal plenary inspiration. And, do you know what he said? He said, “Handling the Scripture day after day was like trying to rewire a house without pulling the main switch.” There’s so much power in the Word of God it just overwhelmed him. You see, *“the [Word] of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul”* (Psalm 19:7).

B. The Scriptures Are Plain

But, not only are the Scriptures powerful; they are also very plain. And, I’m so glad for this. Look, if you will, in verse 7, at the last part: *“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7). Aren’t you glad for that? So plain that a simple person can understand it. You don’t have to be a Ph.D. to understand the Bible. The Bible says the way of the Lord is so plain that that “a wayfaring man, though a stranger, shall not err therein” (Isaiah 35:8). And, God hath *“[hidden] these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes”* (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21). That’s the wonderful thing about the Word of the Lord.

Oh, my friend, it is so perfect, and yet it is so plain to those who want to understand. There is such a wonderful, wonderful thing here. It *“[makes] wise the simple”* (Psalm 19:7). The commands of the Lord are so clear and so plain.

C. The Scriptures Are Pleasing

But now, watch. Not only is God’s Word in the Scripture perfect, and not only is it plain; oh, but it’s so pleasing. Look, if you will, in verse 8: *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart”* (Psalm 19:8). Oh, what joy there is in the Word of God! How pleasing! Don’t ever let the devil make you think that God’s will and God’s plan is hard or bad. No, no, listen. This book is the book that brings joy sweeter than the honeycomb. How the saints of the past and the heroes of the ages have pillowed their heads upon the Scripture, as they walk through those chilly waters of death! How many martyrs have held this book to their bosom, as they have been devoured by the flames? How many mothers, as they have wept over their children, have found help and hope and promises in the Word of God?

I pick up my wife’s Bible so many times, and I look, and there will be one of our children’s names written by a verse, or my name written there, or an episode there where she’s found joy, or found answer to prayer, or a promise from the Word of God. Thank God for this Word that’s so pleasing. I wonder, do you know the joy of getting into the Word of God? One great saint said, “I have no greater joy than to be in a nook with the book.” Oh, to learn the Word of God!

D. The Scriptures Are Pure

But, not only are these words so plain, and pleasing; they’re so pure. Look, if you will, in

verse 8 again. He says, *“The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes”* (Psalm 19:8). Now, there are all kinds of philosophies today and all kinds of ideas that are so wrong. But, in the Bible, you’ll find no mixture of evil. You can trust the purity of the Word of God. Someone has said there are over 6,000 promises in the Bible. I don’t know. I haven’t counted them. I’m just going to tell you what I’ve read, but I’m going to tell you this: that not one of them has ever been broken. *“All of the promises of God are yea and amen in the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

E. The Scriptures Are Permanent

And then, I’ll tell you something else about God’s Word in the Scripture. Not only is it pure; it’s permanent. Look, if you will, in verse 9—the last part. The Bible says His judgments endure forever: *“The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever”* (Psalm 19:9–10). That means that the Scriptures are never out of date. They are never inappropriate. They apply to every age. They apply to every circumstance.

You give me a book—another book—that is millenniums old. And, let some man stand up in the Twentieth Century and try to apply that to your work life tomorrow and see how it will go. Friend, it’s an amazing thing, how the Word of the Lord just endures, how it is so permanent. *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33), God said. And, because it’s all of these other things, the Word of the Lord is precious. Notice in verse 10: *“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”* (Psalm 19:10). The true believer is someone who finds God’s Word precious. Now, I don’t know that a man can truly love God without loving God’s Word. How precious is the Word of God!

I wonder how many of us today—how many of us today—believe that the Word of the Lord is more precious than gold? I’m going to tell you something. You may not believe it, but God is listening. If you were to put any amount of money—million, billion, trillion, doesn’t make any difference—in a stack and say you can have that instead of the Word of God, and there would be no other way that you could get a copy of the Word of God, I’ll tell you in a skinny minute I’d choose the Word of God. I mean that with all of my heart. I’m not standing up here lying. Listen, friend. More than much fine gold is the Word of God, sweeter than the honeycomb. You know God in His Word.

F. The Scriptures Are Protective

Thank God, the glory of God is revealed in the sky, but the grace of God is revealed in the Word of God. And, because, dear friend, it’s precious, it’s also protective. Look in verse 11: *“Moreover by them by is thy servant warned”* (Psalm 19:11). You want to stay out of trouble? You want to learn how to be truly healthy, wealthy, and wise? You want

to learn how to live in this treacherous world? Oh, the Scriptures—the Scriptures—are given to warn you and to protect you.

G. The Scriptures Are Profitable

But, not only are they protective, dear friend; they are profitable. Notice in verse 11: *“And in keeping of them there is great reward”* (Psalm 19:11).

III. God’s Word in the Spirit

Now, you want to know God? There’s God’s Word in the skies. Thank God for that. That tells us of the glory of God. There’s God’s Word in the Scripture. That tells us of the grace of God. There’s one other way that God speaks to you. And, friend, without this way, the other two ways won’t mean anything. And, that is God’s Word in the Spirit. The Spirit of God takes His Word in the sky—that is, in creation; and His Word in the Scripture—that is, in revelation; and God applies it to your heart.

Now, notice what David goes on to say, as He continues this Psalm: *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults”* (Psalm 19:12). Now, he’s speaking to God straight. He’s not talking about the Word. He’s not talking about what God has done, but he’s speaking right to God. *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:12–14).

Now, this is God’s Word in the Spirit, and there are four things the Holy Spirit does in these verses, four things that God’s gracious Holy Spirit does to take the Word in creation and the Word in revelation and bring it home to your heart.

A. The Conviction of the Spirit

The very first thing is the conviction of the Spirit. Notice again in verse 12: *“Who can understand his errors?”* (Psalm 19:12). You can’t, and I can’t. There’s not a one of us who can judge ourselves. Only the Spirit of God can put His finger on our sins. And, before we can truly know God as we ought to know God, we must be searched and convicted by the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus said, in John chapter 16 and verse 8, *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (John 16:8). So many times we foolishly say, “Well, if I know my heart...” But, we don’t know our hearts. But, my dear friend, He knows our heart, and He puts the finger of conviction there where we cannot do anything else. There is the conviction of the Spirit.

B. The Cleansing of the Spirit

But, why does He convict us? To make us feel bad? No, He convicts us to bring us to

step number two, which is the cleansing of the Spirit. *“Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults”* (Psalm 19:12). You see, the Holy Spirit of God takes the blood of Jesus Christ and allows us to confess our sin and helps us to be cleansed from our sin. First John 1, verse 7: *“The blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). That’s what the Spirit of God does. He takes that divine detergent when He convicts us. Then He cleanses us of that sin.

C. The Control of the Spirit

But, wait a minute. He’s not finished with us yet. Just to be convicted and cleansed—don’t stop there. That’s why so many people don’t know God as they ought to know God. Notice what David said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What’s the next step? Then, there is the control of the Spirit. Look, if you will, in verse 13: *“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me”* (Psalm 19:13). Don’t you want to live in liberty? Don’t you want to live in victory? Don’t you want the Holy Spirit of God to convict you, and then to cleanse you, and then to control you, so that you’ll be living, walking in victory day by day? How sad it is—how sad it is—when sin has dominion over a child of God! Sin shall not have dominion over you, my friend, when you walk in the convicting, cleansing, controlling power of the Spirit of God. *“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:2). God forbid that we should be slaves to sin! That is not God’s plan for you. God’s plan for you is that you walk in liberty.

D. The Communion of the Spirit

Now, watch. You’re still not finished. To know God ultimately, not only is there the conviction of the Spirit, not only is there the cleansing of the Spirit, and then the control of the Spirit, but why all of this? Here it is, friend. It brings you to the communion of the Spirit. Notice verse 14—here it is: *“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer”* (Psalm 19:14). To walk with Him, to talk with Him, to commune with Him, to meditate with Him—that’s what it’s all about: to know God—to know God.

Conclusion

How do you know God? Well, there’s His Word in the sky: *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1). There’s the Word in the Scripture: *“The law of the LORD is perfect”* (Psalm 19:7). But, oh, there’s the Word of the Spirit of God that convicts us, that cleanses us, that controls us, and then brings us into sweet communion. And, I want to tell you again, my dear friend—listen to me; listen to me—to know Him is to love Him, to love Him is to trust Him, to trust Him is to obey Him, to obey Him is to be blessed.

It's All About Jesus

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 27, 2005

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 22

“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

PSALMS 22:16–18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Amazing Prophecy of the Cross
 - A. The Words Jesus Would Say on the Cross
 - B. The Supernatural Darkness Upon the Earth
 - C. The Scorn and Ridicule Jesus Would Receive on the Cross
 - D. The Water That Came from Jesus' Side
 - E. Jesus' Bones Twisted out of Joint
 - F. Jesus' Thirst on the Cross
 - G. The Agents of the Crucifixion
 - H. Jesus Stripped of His Clothing Hanging Naked on the Cross
 - I. They Cast Lots for Jesus' Garments
- II. The Agonizing Passion of the Cross
 - A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hand of God
 - B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hand of Man
 - C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hands of Satan
- III. The Abounding Provision of the Cross
 - A. Jesus Is a Prophet
 - B. Jesus Is a Priest
 - C. Jesus Is a King

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 22. How many of you have a Bible tonight? Hold it up. Let me see it. Now, that's beautiful. Now, I know the devil doesn't like that. Psalm 22. If, by chance, you did not bring a Bible, I think it would be most helpful for you to look on with your neighbor, or get a Bible from the pew rack there, because we're going to stay intensively in one Psalm tonight, which is Psalm 22. This morning, Jim Whitmire said, as he was talking about our worship and our church and our music, he used a

phrase that stuck in my heart and mind. He said, “It’s all about Jesus.” And, I said to myself, “That’s a better title for the message that I have tonight than I had,” and I’m just going to call this message tonight, “It’s All About Jesus.”

Now, the entire Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of God is written to help you to love the God of that Word, and His Son, who is Jesus Christ. And, when you do that, it will lead you to worship. I want to remind you again that worship is the bottom line. It is the highest attainment you can reach as worship. We’re saved not so we’ll miss Hell and go to Heaven—that’s a by-product; we’re saved to worship God. Salvation is more than having our sin forgiven; it is coming to a relationship where we can know God intimately and personally for ourselves.

Now, in Psalm 22 we have an amazing story. When you study Psalm 22—listen carefully, church—you’re going to come away loving God more and loving the Word of God more than perhaps any other chapter in the entire Bible. I say without stutter, without hesitation, without exaggeration, that it is an incredible chapter in the Word of God. You cannot read Psalm 22 and go away not loving the Bible and not loving the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as you read Psalm 22, you’ll have to say, “It’s all about Jesus.” “Now, wait a minute, pastor. I thought that’s the Old Testament.” That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you: It’s all about Jesus—It’s all about Jesus. Let’s make some simple points.

I. The Amazing Prophecy of the Cross

First of all, I want you to see what I’m going to call the amazing prophecy of the cross. Look, if you will, for example, in Psalm 22, verse 16. Jesus is speaking, and He says this: “*For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me:*”—now, listen to this—“*they pierced my hands and my feet*” (Psalm 22:16). Now, this was written almost 1,000 years before Jesus Christ walked the dusty shores of Galilee—1,000 years ahead in time. The Psalmist David, in prophecy, wrote of the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now, crucifixion was a Roman form of execution. It did not come into the Jewish world for eight hundred years. In the Bible, in David’s time, when they executed people, they did it by stoning. But, here we find by divine inspiration a prophecy of the cross: “*They pierced my hands and my feet.*”

Now, keep Psalm 22 open, and I want you to see how Psalm 22 is written by divine inspiration, as though one is standing at the very foot of the cross and giving an eyewitness account.

A. The Words Jesus Would Say on the Cross

Number one: the very words that Jesus would say on the cross. Look in verse 1: “*To the*

chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (Psalm 22:1). Now, David prophesies of the Messiah on the cross, saying, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* Now, I don't want you to turn to these, but I'll give them to you. Just put them in your margin. Matthew 27, verse 46: *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46). Jesus was not looking back, quoting David. To the contrary, David was looking forward, quoting Jesus. It is an amazing prophecy.

B. The Supernatural Darkness Upon the Earth

Secondly, not only the words that Jesus would say, but the supernatural darkness that was upon the earth when Jesus was crucified. Look in Psalm 22, verse 2: *"O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent"* (Psalm 22:2). That is, when Jesus was on the cross, it was both day and night. Put in the margin Matthew chapter 27 and verse 45: *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour"* (Matthew 27:45). Jesus spent six agonizing hours upon the cross. Jesus Christ was crucified at 9:00 in the morning and he died at 3:00 in the afternoon. But, it became midnight at high noon. Part of the time that Jesus was on the cross, it was day; another part, it was night—three hours of day and three hours of night when Jesus was crucified. Do you think that's by happenstance that David was able by prophecy to say that a thousand years before Jesus Christ was born? The sun that had looked down upon such mayhem, such filth, such murder, such adultery, such fornication and perverseness hid its face and refused to shine when Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for our sins.

C. The Scorn and Ridicule Jesus Would Receive on the Cross

Thirdly, not only the words that Jesus would say, not only the night and darkness that would be there when Jesus would be crucified, but the scorn and the ridicule that the Son of God would receive upon the cross. Look now in Psalm 22, verses 7 through 13: *"All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion"* (Psalm 22:7–13).

Now, that's what David said a thousand years before Jesus was on the cross. Now,

let me show you how that was fulfilled. Put in your margin Matthew 27, verses 39 and following: *“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and the elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth”* (Matthew 27:39–44).

David prophesied this scorn, and it came. Those who stood around were like strong and vicious bulls. Imagine the Roman soldiers who were there. They looked upward at Jesus on the cross. When you look upward, the jaw becomes unhinged, and the mouth gapes. David said, “They would gape upon the Lord Jesus Christ.” By the way, let me say this: that these prophecies were not fulfilled by Jesus’ friends, but by Jesus’ enemies, for the most part.

D. The Water That Came from Jesus’ Side

Now, fourthly, think of the water that came from the side of Jesus Christ when that wicked spear pierced His beloved Son. Look in Psalm 22 now, and look in verse 14. Messiah says, *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels”* (Psalm 22:14). Jesus is saying, “My heart is broken, and I am poured out like water.” Put in your margin now John 19, verse 34: *“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water”* (John 19:34). Men of medicine tell us that sometimes under great duress this can happen. It was a sign that our Savior died not primarily from the nails, but from a broken heart, all the pain of the Lord Jesus Christ that is indicated when blood and water came from His wounded side. When I thought about this, I had to ask myself this question: Adrian, do the things that broke the heart of Jesus break yours?

E. Jesus’ Bones Twisted out of Joint

Number five: His bones twisted out of joint. Notice again verse 14: *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint”* (Psalm 22:14). Josephus, the historian that I quoted this morning, said that when a person was crucified and they dropped that cross into its socket with a thud, the arms are twisted out of joint. Have you ever had a dislocated bone? Let me tell you what the Bible says now about that in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 35: *“And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots”* (Matthew 27:35). When they crucified Him, His body was mercilessly distorted—hanging on that cross, the bones twisted out of joint.

F. Jesus' Thirst on the Cross

Number six: When Jesus was on that cross, He had a blistering thirst. David, looking forward down through the centuries, prophesied incredibly. Look in verse 15: *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd;”*—do you know what a *potsherd* is? It is a dry, broken vessel—*“and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws”* (Psalm 22:15). It’s thirst, blistering thirst; dried up like a broken vessel with His tongue dry, cleaving to His jaws. Put down in your margin John chapter 19 and verse 28: *“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst”* (John 19:28). The One who made the oceans, the rivers, the rills, the springs, the rains hanging upon that cross, cries out, “I thirst,” prophesied, I say—listen, church—a thousand years before it happened. David, by divine inspiration, dipped his pen in golden glory and described the crucifixion. Continue.

G. The Agents of the Crucifixion

Number seven: The very agents of the crucifixion are prophesied by David and described by him. Go again to Psalm 22:15 and let’s add verse 16: *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;”*—now, watch this—*“and thou…”*—underscore that—*“and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.”* Now, look in verse 16: *“For dogs have compassed me:”*—now, continue—*“the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me”* (Psalm 22:25–26). *“Thou,” “dogs,” “the assembly”*: these are the ones who crucified the Lord Jesus.

First of all, God the Father: *“Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.”* Now, we’ll say more about that later, because there’s something in human nature that is repelled by that, that God had any hand in the crucifixion. But then, also, he talks of dogs. A common term for Gentiles in that day was *dogs*. They were called Gentile dogs. So, he speaks not only of the Almighty, but he speaks of the Gentiles. And then, he speaks of the assembly of the wicked. There he’s talking, in verse 16, about the Jewish council. And, those were the ones who nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross. Who crucified Jesus upon the cross? Well, God the Father, the Gentiles, and the Jewish assembly. All of this foretold by David centuries and centuries before Jesus came to this earth.

H. Jesus Stripped of His Clothing Hanging Naked on the Cross

Number eight: Jesus was stripped of His clothing, and He hung naked upon a cross. Now, the artists have been kind, and Jesus is painted always with some kind of a loincloth, because we feel that is fitting. But, look at verse 17: *“I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me”* (Psalm 22:17). Put out in your margin Matthew 27, verse 28: *“And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe”* (Matthew 27:28). Now, put Matthew 27 and verse 36 there: *“And sitting down they watched him there”* (Matthew 27:36). There’s no attempt to protect His modesty. The darling Son of God, absolute

purity, is hanging naked on a cross, stripped, hanging there in agony. That's the reason, friend, you listen to me. You should never ever be ashamed to stand up for Jesus. We ask people, "Are you willing to come forward and acknowledge Christ as your personal Savior?" "Oh," you say, "well, there are so many people." Jesus hung naked on a cross before a bigger crowd than this. And, the amazing thing is that it was prophesied a thousand years before He came in the flesh. What amazing detail!

I. They Cast Lots for Jesus' Garments

Number nine: They cast lots for His garments. Look, if you will, in verse 18—Psalm 22, verse 18: "*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*" (Psalm 22:18). Now, the Jews of that day had four minor garments and one major garment. They could distribute the four minor garments among the Roman soldiers, but Jesus wore a seamless robe. They didn't want to tear that and split that up, so they cast lots to decide who would get that seamless robe. Now, notice verse 18: "*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*"—my clothing, boys and girls: that's what it means. Then, look in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 35: "*And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots*" (Matthew 27:35). That tells us beyond a shadow of any doubt or peradventure that David was talking about the crucifixion a thousand years before Jesus Christ was born in the flesh. Does that not amaze you? Are you as excited about this as I am? Are you astounded by the intricacy of the Word of God? The ancient Egyptians who built the pyramids used to say, "We build like giants, but we finish like jewelers." That's what God does. Oh, friend, the great, gigantic things that He has done, but the minute detail of the cross.

II. The Agonizing Passion of the Cross

And, what I have said thus far is, I've talked about the amazing prophecy of the cross. Now, I'm going to shift gears. Next, I want to talk about the agonizing passion of the cross. There is no suffering that can even begin to be compared to the suffering of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ upon that wicked cross.

A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hand of God

I remind you again that Jesus suffered at the Holy hand of God. Now, look again in verses 1 through 5: "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me?*" Verse 2: "*O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.*" That is, He's crying out to deaf ears. He says, in verses 4 and 5, "Our fathers trusted you, and they were delivered. They trusted in you, and were not confounded" (Psalm 22:1–5). Why had God turned His back on the Son?

God the Father turned His back on our Lord in His humanity. Why had He done that? Listen very carefully. Because Jesus Christ willingly, voluntarily, vicariously took upon Him the sin of all humanity.

Now, the answer to why God turned His back on Jesus is found in verse 3: *“But thou art holy”* (Psalm 22:3). Habakkuk says of God the Father He is *“of purer eyes than to...look upon iniquity”* (Habakkuk 1:13). And, when Jesus Christ had all of the vile, loathsome sin of the world upon Him, then God the Father had to treat Jesus as He would treat us. And so, that’s the reason Jesus says, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1). When I read this, my heart is deeply moved, because Jesus hung naked on a cross, suspended between Heaven and Earth. Now, listen, church. He died alone, alone between Heaven and Earth, without the help of God the Father. When David, who wrote this Psalm, wrote the next Psalm, Psalm 23, David could say, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). God the Son could not say, “Thou art with me.” He had to say, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* Jesus walked that lonesome, painful, agonizing valley all by Himself.

Now, again, I ask the question: Why did God the Father turn His back on God the Son in His humanity? It is because Jesus Christ, who had been in the bosom of the Father for all eternity, is now not only alienated from the Father—listen, church—he has become the object of the Father’s wrath. You say, “I don’t understand that, pastor.” You have to understand that He is a substitute. He is taking your place. And, therefore, as you would become the object of the Father’s wrath, Jesus is the object of the Father’s wrath. Look at the last part of verse 15. He’s speaking to the Father, and it says, *“Thou hast brought me into the dust of death”* (Psalm 22:15).

Isaiah the prophet helps us to understand it even better in verse 10: *“It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief”* (Isaiah 53:10). There’s no escaping it. God the Father poured out His wrath upon His beloved Son because His beloved Son was our sacrifice. And, Romans 8, verse 32 says God *“spared not his own Son”* (Romans 8:32).

You saw my son here tonight. I have another son. Both of my sons are in the ministry. If you were to ask me, “Will you give me one of your sons that I might butcher and torture him,” I would say, “No, absolutely not!” You say, “That it might save me and I could be forgiven?” I still wouldn’t do it. I’m ashamed to say I don’t love you that much. I don’t love anybody that much. But, *“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”* (John 3:16). He did not spare Jesus. Now, He did not spare Jesus, because Jesus had my sin, your sin, our sin, their sin upon Him. You’re reasonable. Do you think, therefore, that God will spare you if you don’t receive Jesus, if you don’t put your faith where God has put your sin? Be reasonable, church. If there were ever a time

when God would have been tempted to be lenient upon sin, it was when that sin was upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hand of Man

Jesus suffered at the Holy hand of God. But, I want to tell you what else he suffered. He suffered at the hateful hand of man, because men were the perpetrators, and they were not innocent. Yes, God, in His infinite wisdom, allowed it, but notice Psalm 22, verses 6 through 8. The Savior says, *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him”* (Psalm 22:6–8).

What humiliation! The Son of God describes Himself as a worm. We strut; we boast. Jesus *“made himself of no reputation”* (Philippians 2:7). The worm that he is talking about here is called the crimson crocus. It was a small animal that was crushed to make red dye, crimson dye. And, I believe it is a prophecy of the spilt blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—or better yet, the shed blood. *“Though your sins be as crimson, they shall be white as snow”* (Isaiah 1:18). Thank God for His crimson blood that washes away our crimson sin. Thank God for that.

C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hands of Satan

Now, friend, Jesus suffered at the hateful hands of men. Who crucified Jesus? By the way, I’ve just written a book—and this is not a commercial, but it’s in the bookstore—called *His Passion and Our Purpose*, and it deals with Mel Gibson’s film. And, people asking the question, Who crucified Jesus? God the Father—the holy hands of God. The hateful hands of men—our sins were the nails that held Jesus to the cross, and our hard hearts the hammers that drove those nails. But, thirdly, Jesus was crucified at the hellish hand of Satan. Look, if you will again, in Psalm 22, verses 19 through 21: *“But be thou not far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns”* (Psalm 22:19). *“The lion’s mouth”*: who is that? That is Satan himself. That’s the power of darkness. Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Hell was having a holiday when Jesus Christ was on the cross. Jesus called it, in Luke 22 and verse 53, *“the power of darkness”* (Luke 22:53).

We see the agony of the cross. There’s no death like crucifixion—none! Execution by crucifixion is a terrible thing. I took a course in criminology. I went to Rayford Prison there in Florida where people are electrocuted in that chair. I went into the room where the electric chair is. I sat down in that chair. I put my hands on the arms where the electrodes are, and put my legs back where again they would be strapped down. And, I

thought, “What a terrible thing,”—Ken—“it must be to be electrocuted!” To see the body stiffen, the smoke rise, the eyes bulge: that’s a terrible thing—or, to be put to death by an injection, as the body stiffens and the nostrils are enlarged and quivers. But, oh, there is no execution, none, like crucifixion.

I hope you understand that when Jesus Christ died on that cross, Jesus literally baptized his soul in Hell for you. In six hours, the eternities were compressed. In six hours, the sins of the world were distilled, and Jesus, the Son of God, died at the Holy hands of God, the hateful hands of man, and the hellish hands of Satan. Why? Because He loves us. But, the point I’m making is—folks, listen—this is 1,000 years before Jesus Christ came. You’re going to find at least 33 precise details of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in this Psalm written before Jesus came to this earth.

III. The Abounding Provision of the Cross

Now, last of all, not only the amazing prophecies, and the agonizing passion, but I want you to notice the abounding provision of the cross. Look what happens now. I want you to see how this Psalm just changes gears. I want you to see how it twists and turns around now, because it’s been going down, down, down, and now it turns and begins to go up. But, look in verse 22—what an amazing thing: *“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee”* (Psalm 22:22). I thought He was going to be crucified. I thought He was dead. But, now here He is pictured in the midst of the congregation praising the Lord. Jesus Christ now is pictured in this prophecy as prophet, priest, and king. Let me share that, and I’ll be finished.

A. Jesus Is a Prophet

As a prophet, Jesus declares the Father. Listen to that: *“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation...”* (Psalm 22:22). Do you know what Jesus is doing here? He’s making known the Father to you. Jesus said, “I have come that you might know the Father.” And, there’s no way that you will know the Father except through the Son. *“No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”* Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6). And, where is Jesus declaring the Father? *“In the midst of the congregation.”* He says in this Psalm, “I will sing praise. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation.”

When we had that wonderful song service tonight, you sang, you sang, you sang, but there was an unseen guest here tonight who was singing praise to God and declaring the name of God. You ought to be ashamed if you don’t sing, if the Savior is there with you singing. And, you ought to be ashamed if you don’t attend, when Jesus shows up at church in a very special way. Now, He’s everywhere, but there’s a sense in which He is especially here. *“Where two or three are gathered together in my name,*

there am I in the midst" (Matthew 18:20).

You say, "Well, pastor, I don't believe I just have to attend church that much." Well, you're going to miss a blessing. Those who are not here tonight have missed a blessing. There are some folks who call themselves church members that go to church about three times: when they're hatched, when they're matched, and when they're dispatched. The first time they throw water, second time they throw rice, and the third time they throw dirt. No. The Bible says, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25). I hope that you will continue faithful attendance to church, because Jesus does. If He shows up in the midst of the brethren to declare the Father, you ought to be here. You say, "Well, I can listen on radio," or, "I can read about it," or, "I can..." That's not the same—not the same.

A man wrote his girlfriend a letter every day. For 365 days he wrote his girlfriend a letter. You know what happened? She married the mailman.

Be here! Be faithful! Be loyal, because this Savior is a prophet who declares the Father. And, when He does it, He does it in the midst of the congregation.

B. Jesus Is a Priest

But, not only is He a prophet; He is a priest to deliver the faithful. Look in verse 26: "*The meek*"—the meek—"*shall eat and be satisfied*" (Psalm 22:26). He is the bread of Heaven. He is our priest that feeds us and delivers us. As I said this morning, He feeds us a better feast than Solomon.

C. Jesus Is a King

But, not only is He prophet and priest; He is king. Look in verses 27 and 28: "*All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations*" (Psalm 22:27–28). This One that they stepped on, this worm, this One that God the Father had to hide his face from, this One that men spat upon and mocked; He is the King of kings. He is the Lord of lords. "*The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Habakkuk 2:14). When Jesus was going to Golgotha along that road they call the Via Dolorosa, women were standing there looking at His suffering, and they were weeping. And, Jesus said, "Don't weep for me; weep for yourselves. This is your hour. My hour has not yet come" (Luke 23:28; Luke 22:53; John 2:4).

Church, you listen to me. His hour is coming, and I can hardly wait. One of my favorite scriptures in the Bible is 1 Timothy 6, verse 15, which says, "*Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*" (1 Timothy 6:15). I love that song, Ken, that says,

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

*Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

—ISAAC WATTS

I wrap it up with this verse. Look, if you will, in verse 31: *“They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this”* (Psalm 22:31). Who were the people that shall be born? Lift your hand. Hold it up. Say that, “I’m the one that he’s talking about.” Are you getting this? Are you understanding this? David, looking down through the centuries, looks at the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then he says, “It is for a people that shall be born.” And it says, “They will say He hath done this.” Do you know what *“he hath done this”* means literally? “It is finished.” Second Chronicles chapter 4 and verse 11: *“And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons. And Hiram finished the work that he was to make”* (2 Chronicles 4:11). Now, where it says there he *“finished the work,”* it’s exactly the same word that says, *“he hath done this.”* It is a Hebrew word, *asah*, which means in one word, “it is finished.” And, when Jesus, the Son of God, bowed His head upon Calvary’s cross, He said in one word, *“tetalestai,”* which means, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30).

Conclusion

Now, I’ve taken a little more time tonight than I would normally take, but I’m getting it all out of my system. Church, we have a wonderful Savior, and we have a great book. Nothing like this could ever be written by happenstance. And, as you read this Psalm, you have to love the of Word of God, and you have to love the Son of God. There’s no other way for the person who will keep his or her heart open. May our church always be a church of the Word that finds Jesus in everything, because it’s all about Him.

The Prophecy of Jesus

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 21, 1996

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 22

“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

PSALMS 22:16–18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Prophecy of the Cross
- II. The Agony of the Cross
 - A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hand of God
 - B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hand of Man
 - C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hand of Satan
- III. The Victory of the Cross
 - A. He Is Prophet
 - B. He Is Priest
 - C. He Is King

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 22 in your Bibles, and if you don't have a Bible, look there in the rack before you. There may be one there. Find Psalms 22. The Book of Psalms is basically in the middle of the Bible. Find Psalms 22, and when you've found it, look up here for just a moment—Psalms 22.

I was reading last week in the newspapers about a 24-year-old gentle giant, Shaquille O'Neal, affectionately called Shaq. The interesting thing to me about this young man is that he signed a contract with the Los Angeles Lakers for 123 million dollars—123 million dollars! Well, what does Shaquille O'Neal do for 123 million dollars? Well, he takes a pumpkin-sized ball and puts it through a metal hoop, and for that they give him 123 million dollars over a period of seven years, because he can do that better than most people. He can take that ball and put it through that iron ring. That's it, folks. Well, people like to see him do that. They call that entertainment. And, it seems to me like an awful lot, but I suppose that's what the market will bear, and that's what he collects.

But, I want to tell you another young man. This young man was 33 years of age. The many were not giving to Him. He gave to the many. His name? Jesus of Nazareth. He died upon a cross. The price that He paid was more than 123 million dollars—was the silver of His tears, the gold of His blood; not for entertainment, but for redemption.

Now, the thing I love about the Old Testament is the thing I love about the New Testament. The Old Testament and the New Testament both are the inspired Word of God. And, don't get the idea that the Old Testament has a different message than the New Testament. All of the Bible is about Jesus. Do you understand that? Now, listen. All of the Bible is about Jesus. If you read the Bible and you don't find Jesus, you'd better go reread it, whether you're reading in the Old Testament or in the New Testament. It's a *Him book*; it's about Him. Somebody may ask if you've read the four Gospels. I've read all 66. All 66 books in this Bible tell about the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, has the same villain; his name is Satan. It has the same hero; His name is Jesus. It has the same purpose: to present salvation that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, what we're going to read is an Old Testament passage of Scripture, written about 1,000 years before Jesus appeared in bodily form on this earth. And yet, as you read this Old Testament passage of Scripture, you're going to be amazed, because it sounds like it was written by an eyewitness of the death of the Lord Jesus. It sounds as if the person who wrote it were standing at the very foot of the cross. Just put your eyes down on verse 16 in this Psalm, if you will: *"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet"* (Psalm 22:16). When Jesus was on that cross, they drove hellish nails through His hands and through His feet. And, 1,000 years before Jesus walked the dusty shores of Galilee, it is written in the Word of God by prophecy that they would pierce His hands and His feet.

Now, when this was written, the form of capital punishment was stoning. This was written by a Jew in a Jewish society. The Romans didn't come along until 800 years later. Crucifixion was a Roman form of torture, not Jewish. And yet, in the inspired Word of God, by prophecy, we see the crucifixion of Jesus Christ delineated. There are three things in this Psalm I want you to see. And, we're going to think about the cross. We're going to glory in the cross. The Apostle Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory in anything else except the cross of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). At the cross, when man's sin rose up and God's love reached down; at the cross, where you see the hellishness of man and the holiness of God; at the cross, all of the centuries come together. And, we're going to think about the cross, but we're going to think about the cross not from the New Testament, but we're going to think about the cross primarily from the Old Testament.

From Psalm 22, three things I want you to see concerning the cross. I want you to

see the prophecy of the cross. I want you to see that the cross is not an afterthought, that the cross was not some emergency action, that the cross was not incidental, that Jesus did not die as a victim, as a martyr, but that the cross was in the heart and mind of God before He slung this planet into space. For the Bible says that Christ was crucified before the foundation of the world, that is, in the heart and mind of God (1 Peter 1:20). So, you're going to see the prophecy of the cross. And, when you see the prophecy of the cross, when you see what God has done to prophesy the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, I say, 1,000 years before He was crucified, you're going to step back and say, "Indeed, the Bible is the inspired Word of God."

The second thing I want you to see is the agony of the cross. And, when you see the price that Jesus paid for your soul, for your redemption, what the Son of man and the Son of God went through that you might be redeemed, you're going to stand back and lift up your heart in your hands and say, "Thank You, Lord Jesus. I love You. I bless You. I praise You that You did that for me."

Then, the third thing you're going to see today is the victory of the cross. Oh, the victory that Jesus won there that day in that battle of the ages! And then, you're going to see how that victory applies to you. And then, you're going to be able to say, "Thank God, hallelujah, we have the victory in the Lord Jesus Christ!" The prophecy, the agony, the victory of the cross: let's look at it.

I. The Prophecy of the Cross

Let's look at the prophecy of the cross. Did you know that there are at least 33 exact prophecies concerning the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ right here in this Psalm 22? An incredible thing. I say, direct prophecies. Let's look at them.

For example, well, look in verse 1. The very words that Jesus Christ would say on the cross are prophesied here: "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (Psalm 22:1). Now, when Jesus Christ was crucified, He uttered those words. As a matter of fact, put this in your margin —Matthew chapter 27 and verse 46. And, here's what the New Testament says: "*About the ninth hour*"—that is, when Jesus was on the cross there, the ninth hour—"*Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46). The very words that Jesus would say were written here 1,000 years before He would say them. Now, I remind you of this: that Jesus, when He was on the cross, was not looking back, quoting poetry, but David, when he wrote this, was by divine inspiration looking forward, quoting Jesus. This was a prophecy: the very words that Jesus would say.

The supernatural darkness that would come on the land when Jesus was crucified is prophesied here. Look in verse 2: "*O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent*" (Psalm 22:2). So Jesus was on the cross

both in the day and the night. Now, look, if you will, or put in your Bible Matthew chapter 27 and verse 45: *“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour”* (Matthew 27:45). Now, Jesus was put on the cross at nine in the morning. He died at three in the afternoon. For six agonizing hours Jesus Christ hung upon that cross. Six is the number of man. For three hours it was daylight. And then, at high noon the sun refused to shine and darkness hid the face of the sun. The sun that had looked down upon so many rapes and murders, heartache, wars, filth, pillage—the sun refused to look upon that scene, and the skies were darkened. Three hours of day, three hours of night, when Jesus was on the cross, but see how it is prophesied here in verse 2: *“O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.”*

The third thing: the scorn, the ridicule that was given to the Son of God upon that cross is prophesied here. Look, if you will, in verses 7 through 12: *“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round”* (Psalm 22:7–12). There it speaks of the ridicule, the shame, the scorn that was given to the Lord Jesus.

Now, that’s the Old Testament. Turn to the Book of Matthew, and look in Matthew chapter 27, verses 39 and following. Listen to how the Bible describes Jesus. He’s hanging there in agony and blood upon the cross. And, verse 39 says, *“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth”* (Matthew 27:39–44).

Amazing! Psalm 22 speaks of these same people that the Gospel writer Matthew speaks of. He speaks of them like strong bulls. These Roman soldiers—I can see them standing there—known for their strength. He speaks of their mouths that gape open. They’re looking up at Him. When you stand on the ground and look up, your jaw drops, and there Jesus, looking down from the cross, sees their gaping mouths. I want to remind you that these Scriptures, like so many, were not fulfilled by Jesus’ friends trying to make Him look like the Messiah. They were fulfilled by Jesus’ enemies. This was not

rigged. Those who hated Him most fulfilled the very scriptures that prophesied what He would do and proved Him to be exactly who He was.

Notice again in verse 14 the water that flowed from the wounded side of the Lord Jesus. Look at it: *“I am poured out like water”* (Psalm 22:14)—*“I am poured out like water.”* That was said a thousand years before He was crucified, but read in John chapter 19 and verse 34: *“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water”* (John 19:34). An amazing prophecy! Where did that blood and water come from? Well, that surcharged blood was there in His body. But, what about the water? Medical people tell us that under great duress, the separation of the serum there in the body turns to clear liquid. This speaks of the great duress that our Lord was under. He didn't die literally from the loss of blood. He died from duress. He died from a broken heart, though He shed His blood upon that cross. And, as I read that, I wonder if the things that broke the heart of Jesus break mine this morning.

Then, notice how on the cross His body was twisted out of joint. Look in verse 14: *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint”* (Psalm 22:14). Josephus, who was a Jewish historian who wrote about the life of the Jews, wrote about crucifixion. And, he said that crucifixion was meant to bring stark terror to the minds of those who saw it happen; therefore, crucifixions were public. They wanted people to see the suffering of that man on the cross, to say, “Whatever he did, I'll not do it.” But, they would take the cross with the victim already nailed to it, lift up the cross, and then, with a thud, drop it into that cavity, into that hole. When that was done, the shoulders were twisted out of joint, and they would hang there with a dislocated shoulders. That's what the prophet is talking about here. “I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint.”

Then, notice the blistering thirst of the Lord Jesus upon the cross. Look in verse 15: *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd;”*—do you know what a potsherd is? That's a piece of broken pottery, drier than a bone—*“and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death”* (Psalm 22:15). Jesus is thirsty, and the Bible tells us, in John chapter 19, verse 28, *“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst”* (John 19:28). Here's the One who created every river, every spring, every ocean. Here is the One who gave us peace like a river and love like an ocean and joy like a fountain, and yet He cries out in agony with His bones out of joint, with His hands and His feet pierced. He cries out, “I thirst!” Amazing detail. This is written centuries before Jesus ever died.

Those who nailed Him to the cross, those who were the agents of the crucifixion, are clearly described. Who crucified the Lord Jesus? It may surprise you to know, number one, that God the Father crucified Him. You say, “I don't understand that.” Well, keep

that question, and we'll come to it in a moment. But, look in verse 15: "*Thou...*"—he's speaking to God—"*Thou hast brought me into the dust of death*" (Psalm 22:15).

But, not only did God the Father crucify Him; we the Gentiles crucified Him. Look in verse 16: "*For dogs hath compassed me*" (Psalm 22:16). Now, the Jews of that day called a Gentile a *two-legged dog*. This speaks of the Gentiles who were there at the cross. Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. Pilate, the Roman governor, gave Him to be crucified.

And then, the Jewish leaders crucified Jesus. Look in verse 16. The Bible says, "*The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me*" (Psalm 22:16). "*The assembly of the wicked*" speaks of the Jewish council.

Who crucified the Lord Jesus? God the Father, the Gentiles, the Jews crucified the Lord Jesus. You say, "I don't understand why you say God the Father did it." Keep that question in your heart. We'll come to it in a moment. But, the agents of the crucifixion are there.

And then, the very fact that they stripped Him of His garments, that's there. Look in verse 17: "*I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me*" (Psalm 22:17). The reference in the New Testament—Matthew chapter 27 and verse 28: "*And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe*" (Matthew 27:28). Matthew 27, verse 36: "*And sitting down they watched him there*" (Matthew 27:36). That's exactly what the Old Testament says. "*I may tell all my bones.*" There's nothing hidden. Those artists who have painted the crucifixion have been restrained. But, had you seen Jesus as He was truly crucified, you would not have been able hardly to recognize Him as a human being. His face is bruised and battered. His back has been torn to shreds. His bones are out of joint, and He has not one stitch of clothing upon Him. They have stripped Him naked. That's what the Scripture tells us about here in verse 17: "*I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.*"

And then, while He was there on the cross, they gambled for His garments. Look in verse 18: "*They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture*" (Psalm 22:18). How is that fulfilled in the New Testament? Well, Matthew 27, verse 35: "*And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots*" (Matthew 27:35). Matthew, who wrote this, knew that Jesus was fulfilling Scripture. There were four minor garments and one major garment, so they could take the four minor garments and part them among the people. But, when they came to that seamless robe, they said, "Let's not cut this in pieces. Let's roll the dice. Let's gamble for His garments."

Now, these are only some of the details that prophesy the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. I recently was in Cairo and saw the pyramids, saw what the ancient

Egyptians did. The ancient Egyptians said, “We build like giants, but we finish like jewelers.” Indeed, when God was doing this, He was building like a giant, but He finished like a jeweler. Can you imagine the detail that’s in this prophecy? How can anybody—how can anybody—take this prophecy and fail to understand the inspiration of the Word of God? That this is done by mere chance is absolutely, totally, unthinkably impossible. Thank God for the Word of God.

II. The Agony of the Cross

That’s the prophecy of the cross. But, now we’re going to shift gears, and I want you to see the agony of the cross. I want you to see the price that was paid that you might be here in this church this morning and worship Him and know absolutely beyond the shadow of any doubt or peradventure that your sin is forgiven and that Heaven is your home. Why such agony? No one ever suffered as Jesus suffered. And, how did Jesus suffer?

A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hand of God

Well, number one: Jesus suffered by the holy hand of God. I mentioned that and told you not to forget it. Read again the first five verses: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel”* (Psalm 22:1–3).

Let’s just stop there. *“Thou art holy.”* God answers the question. The answer to that question is found in verse 3. Why did God the Father forsake God the Son? Because God the Father is holy. If you had to get one word out of all of the words in the dictionaries of all of the world to describe God Almighty, in my humble opinion, it would have to be the word *holy*. Thank God no word or no combination of words can describe Him. But, God is a holy God. The angels cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts!”

And, God being holy means that God cannot look upon, God cannot countenance, sin. The prophet Habakkuk says of Him, *“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold...iniquity”* (Habakkuk 1:13). And, when Jesus Christ was on that cross, Jesus was iniquity. You say, “Now, wait a minute. He was the holy Son of God.” Yes, He was. But, the Bible says of the Lord Jesus, “Him who knew no sin”—that’s Jesus—“God hath made to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is, our sins were placed upon the Lord Jesus. Every lie, every blasphemy, every bit of debauchery, all perversion, all filth, all drunkenness, all rape, all murder, all unbelief, all blasphemy was upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And, there upon Jesus were the sins of the world; and, Jesus, therefore, bearing the sins of the world, bore the punishment that those sins deserve. And, just as I would be forsaken by God if I were to die in my sins, Jesus was forsaken by the Father

because He died for my sins.

Jesus cries, *“My God, my God...”* God the Son is speaking to God the Father: *“My God.”* God the Son is speaking to God the Spirit: *“My God.”* God the Father, God the Son, are separated at Calvary. You say, “Pastor, I don’t understand that. How could God forsake God?” I don’t understand it myself, but I know this: that Jesus baptized His soul in Hell for me. I know that Jesus, who from eternity past had been in the bosom of the Father, now not only is separated from the Father, but He has become the object of the Father’s loathing. Notice verse 15: *“Thou hast brought me into the dust of death”* (Psalm 22:15).

Who crucified Jesus? Read Isaiah chapter 53, verse 10: “It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him” (Isaiah 53:10). “It pleased Jehovah.” It didn’t mean it made Jehovah happy. It means that that was the will of Jehovah. “It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him.” Read in Romans 8, verse 32: *“He that spared not his own Son”* (Romans 8:32). Now, if there were ever a time when God would have been lenient on sin, it would have been when that sin was upon Jesus. You think about it. Here Jesus is bearing the sin of the world. I want to ask you a question: Can God—will God—overlook sin? Well, if there ever had been a time when God would have overlooked sin, that would have been when that sin was resting upon the Lord Jesus. But, the Bible says, in Romans 8, verse 32, that God spared not His own Son. Now, you’re reasonable people. Look up here. If God spared not the Lord Jesus when your sin was upon the Lord Jesus, do you think God will spare you if your sin is not forgiven in the Lord Jesus? I mean, if God spared not His own Son!

Therefore, what should you do with your sin? Where should you place your faith? Place your faith where God put your sin: on Jesus—on Jesus. So, when Jesus was on the cross, He was there as my substitute, and the fires of God’s wrath burned themselves out on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus walked the burning corridors of Hell for you and me.

B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hand of Man

But, not only did Jesus die by the holy hand of God; He died by the hateful hand of man. Look again in verse 6 of this same chapter: *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people”* (Psalm 22:6). Now, here’s the Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory, and He is described as a worm. And, the word for *worm* here is for the crimson crocus, a small worm that was crushed to give crimson dye. This worm was crushed to dye things crimson—His crimson blood for our crimson sin. If you step on a serpent, a serpent will strike back; but, you step on a worm, he doesn’t strike back. When Jesus was reviled, He reviled not again. And, Jesus, like a worm, is crushed. Satan said, “I will exalt myself above the stars of God” (Isaiah 14:13). But, Jesus, *“being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation”*

(Philippians 2:6–7).

He's described here as a worm to be stepped on. Would you step on Him? Let me give you what the writer of Hebrews has to say about that. Hebrews 10, verse 29: *"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"* (Hebrews 10:29). Everyone in this building today will leave through one of these doors, and when you leave, you will either walk out under the blood or over the blood. Now, think about it. Everybody here will either acknowledge the precious blood of Jesus, take that blood as a covering for their sin, and say, "Thank You, Lord, for the blood that was shed for me," or you will say, "He is no more than a worm," and you will trample Him beneath your feet. Now, the writer of Hebrews says, "What kind of punishment belongs to the man who takes the blood of Jesus and counts it as an unholy thing and tramples it beneath his feet?" Don't leave today trampling the blood of Jesus beneath your feet.

Years ago, I heard Tom Elliff tell a story about a man who was sitting in his office. He was a businessman. He got one of those phone calls that none of us want to get. He said, "Sir, we hate to tell you, but your son, your grown son, was crossing the street. He was hit by an automobile." "Well, how is he?" "Sir, we have no other way to tell you but this: your son was killed instantly." "Well, where was it?" "It was at thus-and-such a corner. We have his body down here at the hospital. We'd like for you to come down." "Well," he said, "I'll be right there." And, he put on his coat. And, he remembered the spot where they said his son had been hit by that automobile, and he drove past that spot. And, he could see there in the pavement, in the asphalt, the blood of his son. And, by then the ambulance had come and gone, and by then the police had left. And, automobiles, with their dirty tires, were running right through that blood down the street. It enraged him! He didn't know what to do. He got out of the car. He stopped. He took off his coat. He got out in the traffic and said, "Stop! Stop! Stop! You can't do that! That's my son's blood! Don't you run your cars through that!" I wonder how God feels when we trample beneath our feet the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hand of Satan

He died at the holy hand of God. He died at the hateful hand of man. He died at the hellish hand of Satan. The demons of Hell drove Him to the cross. When He was on that cross, Hell had a holiday. The Bible speaks there of a lion there that day. Go back to Psalm 22, if you will. Look in verse 19: *"Be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth"* (Psalm 22:19–21)—that hellish lion of Hell, Satan, who roars against Him. All of the demons of the pit erupted upon the Lord Jesus.

All of the artillery of Hell was released upon the Lord Jesus. Jesus, going to the cross, said, in Luke chapter 22, verse 53, *“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”* (Luke 22:53). Jesus was under the very assault of Hell.

What I’m trying to say is this: that no man ever suffered like the Lord Jesus. Psalm 22 describes the agony of the cross. How did Jesus suffer? At the holy hand of God, for He was bearing the sins of the world; at the hateful hand of men, who spat in His face and buffeted Him; at the hellish hand of Satan, as Hell had a holiday. Nobody has ever suffered like the Lord Jesus, and He did it alone. *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Psalm 22:1). God the Father turned the back. His disciples shrank back. Suspended between Heaven and Earth Jesus died. When David died, who wrote this Psalm—when David died, he wrote in the next Psalm, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). But, Jesus went through this valley all by Himself. Nobody knows the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, listen to me. Jesus died for you. He died on that cross. But, He died for all of the world at one time, and He died for all time at one time. That is, being the infinite Son of God, Jesus died and paid in a finite period of time the infinite debt of sin. Jesus, when He was on that cross, had the eternities compressed upon Him, the sins of the world distilled upon Him, and therefore He, being infinite, died and paid in a finite period of time what we, being finite, would pay in an infinite period of time. I don’t know whether you understand that or not. But, folks, I’m telling you that no one ever paid a price like Jesus.

III. The Victory of the Cross

There is the prophecy of the cross. There is the agony of the cross. And, very quickly, I want you to see the victory of the cross. In this Psalm, suddenly in verse 22 of Psalm 22, there’s a change. There’s a sudden break in the Psalm now. Notice how it changes. He has now paid the price. He is now raised from the dead. And, He shows Himself as prophet, priest, and king.

A. He Is Prophet

As prophet, who speaks for God, He will declare God to you and to me. Look in verse 22: *“I will declare thy name”*—here’s God the Son speaking to God the Father—*“unto my brethren.”*—that’s us—*“in the midst of the congregation”*—that’s here—*“will I praise thee”* (Psalm 22:22).

Jesus is here today. Jesus is making God the Father known to us today. For Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: and no man can come unto the Father but by me”* (John 14:6). And, now as prophet, Jesus is speaking to the Church, and He is

telling us of God the Father. He is declaring God. I love that. As a matter of fact, this Psalm says that Jesus is going to sing praises in the midst of His brothers. That's why when we have a song service you ought to sing, because beside that person to your right and that person to your left is the Lord Jesus. And, every time we meet, He's here, for He says, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). And, what is Jesus, the crucified Son of God, doing as prophet? He is speaking to the Church. He is declaring God the Father.

B. He Is Priest

But, not only is He prophet; He is priest. Look in verse 26 of this same Psalm, if you will: *"The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever"* (Psalm 22:26). Jesus gave Himself for us that He might give Himself to us. He is the bread of Heaven. We feed on Him. As priest now, He makes intercession for us, and He lifts us to God the Father. He says, *"The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever."*

C. He Is King

But not only is He prophet, and not only is He priest; He is prince and king. Now, not only will He declare the Father, not only will He deliver the faithful, but He will dominate the future. This is the part that I love. Let's read the last few verses, beginning in verse 27: *"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations"* (Psalm 22:27–28). Friend, I want to tell you something. *People want to know what this world is coming to. I'll tell you what it's coming to. It's coming to Jesus.* Jesus is going to reign from Mount Zion. God will set His King upon His holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6). As prophet, He speaks to the Church. As priest, He intercedes for me. And, as prince, He is coming again to rule and to reign. *"And the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as waters that cover the sea"* (Habakkuk 2:14).

I don't know whether you believe that or not, but I believe it. I believe that this One that they accounted as a worm, this One that was crushed at Calvary, has risen from the dead, He has ascended to the high hills of glory, and one day soon and very soon, He—Jesus—is coming again. And, the Bible says, *"For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations"* (Psalm 22:28). Verse 30 speaks of you: *"A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this"* (Psalm 22:30). Do you know what *"He hath done this,"* how that is translated? That is one Hebrew word: *finished*. *Finished*—it's finished.

Do you know what Jesus said on the cross? *"Finished"*—*"Tetelestai"* (John 19:30).

How does this Psalm begin? With the words that Jesus said on the cross, “*My God, my God.*” How does this Psalm end? With what Jesus said on the cross when He bowed His head and died, “Finished. It’s done. It is done.”

Conclusion

Now, listen to me. Listen to me. God brought you here today that you might see the prophecy of the cross. And, believe in the inspiration of the Word of God. God brought you here today that you might see the agony of the cross and know the price that was paid for your redemption. And, God brought you here today that you might see the victory of the cross, that Jesus, risen from the dead, is prophet, priest, and king. And, as prophet, He declares the Father. As priest, He delivers the faithful. And, as king, He dominates the future. What a mighty God we serve! I love Jesus. I love Him. And, I praise Him. And, I want you to love Him. And, I want you to be saved. And, I don’t want you to walk out of here over the blood, but under the blood, because God says, “You just can’t do that to the blood of My Son. You cannot trample His blood beneath your feet.”

An Old Testament Calvary

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 7, 1992

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 22:1–31

“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

PSALMS 22:16–18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Prophecy of the Cross
- II. The Agony of the Cross
 - A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hands of God
 - B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hands of Man
 - C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hands of Satan
- III. The Victory of the Cross
 - A. Jesus as Prophet
 - B. Jesus as Priest
 - C. Jesus as King

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and find the heart of the Bible, the Book of Psalms, and then find what in my estimation is perhaps the most remarkable Psalm of all of the Psalms. You may think I’m talking about Psalm 23, but I’m talking about Psalm 22, the Old Testament Calvary—the Old Testament Calvary.

Let me tell you one of the ways that I know that I know that I know that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. May I tell you how? Friend, it is fulfilled prophecy. No one could write a book like the Bible apart from divine inspiration. Not only fulfilled prophecy, but the wonderful unity of the Bible. In a moment I’m going to read to you a Psalm that was written 800 years before Jesus Christ. And, it sounds as if someone is standing at the foot of the cross writing this Psalm. And, I want to remind you that even though this Psalm speaks of the nailing of Jesus to the cross—*“They pierced my hands and my feet”* (Psalm 22:16). Crucifixion like that was not known until the Romans came. The Jews executed by stoning. And yet, we have a picture of a Roman form of execution that was going to come 800 years later. And, I’m going to show you from the Word of

God, how minutely—how minutely—God prophesied the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was said of the builders of the ancient pyramids, the Egyptians, as they boasted about what they did, they said of themselves, “We build like giants, but we finish like jewelers”—“like jewelers.” That is, they did massive things, but oh, how careful they were at the smallest detail. And, you’re going to see that as we study this twenty-second Psalm together, and I’m going to tell you, my dear friend, that the fulfilled prophecy of the Bible is proof—irrefutable proof, indisputable proof—that the Bible must be—it must be, it must be—the inspired Word of God.

But, not only the fulfilled prophecy, but the wonderful unity of the Bible. The Old and the New Testament tell the same story. Learn this about the Bible, friend, and you’ll know how to understand the Bible. The Bible has but one hero; His name is Jesus. The Bible has but one villain; his name is Satan. The Bible has but one message: Jesus saves—Jesus saves. That is it, friend. If you don’t understand that, you don’t understand what the Bible is all about. The hero of the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, is Jesus Christ. The villain of the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, is Satan himself. The message of the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, is Jesus saves.

Now, I hope by now your appetite is whetted, and I want you to see this Old Testament Calvary. Look, if you will now, and begin to read in Psalm 22: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion”* (Psalm 22:1–13).

Note especially verses 14, 15 and 16: *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my*

vesture” (Psalm 22:14–18).

We’ll come to all of the Psalm before we’re finished this morning, and so we must hurry. But, I have divided the Psalm this morning into three parts. And, I want you to see what I’m going to call the prophecy of the cross. Then, I want you to see what I’m going to call the agony of the cross. And then, bless God, the victory of the cross. And, if you love the Lord Jesus, and if you love the Word of God, you’re going to be blessed today.

I. The Prophecy of the Cross

Now, first of all, I want you to see what I’m going to call the prophecy of the cross. And, I want you to see, as I have said, almost a thousand years before Jesus Christ was ever born—almost 1,000 years—here is an account of the crucifixion of Jesus that sounds like an eyewitness standing at the very cross of Jesus Christ. For example, the very words that Jesus Christ would say on the cross. Look, if you will, in verse 1: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 27, and leave it open in Psalm 22 and Matthew 27, both of these together. Look, if you will, in verse 46. Jesus is on the cross, and the Bible says that, *“[At] about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say,”*—are you ready?—*“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46).

The exact words that are recorded in Psalm 22 came from the mouth of the Lord Jesus. “Well,” you say, “pastor, that’s easy. Jesus looked back and read Psalm 22, and when He was on the cross, He was quoting poetry. No, my dear friend, Jesus was not looking backward, quoting poetry. David was looking forward, quoting Jesus. It was a prophecy of what the Lord Jesus Christ would say on the cross: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*”

Secondly, look in verse 2, and see about the supernatural darkness that came that day when Jesus was crucified: *“O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent”* (Psalm 22:2). Now, my dear friend, the Bible teaches that when Jesus Christ was crucified, it was both day and night. For example, you’re there in Matthew chapter 27—look in verse 45. The Bible says, *“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour”* (Matthew 27:45).

Now, let’s get our chronology correct. Jesus Christ was crucified, according to the Bible, at nine in the morning. He died at three in the afternoon. He was on the cross six hours. Why six? Because He was dying for the sins of man, and six is the number of a man. But, at noontime—at noontime—that is, at the ninth hour, which was noontime—the ninth hour according to how they reckoned time, not after He had been on the cross nine hours—but at midday, it became dark. The heavens were darkened at noonday. I think about the sun that had looked down upon all of the filth and rape and murder and pillage and famines and wars. But, the sun continued to shine. But, when the Son of

God hung on the cross, the glowing face of the sun in the heavens was veiled, and it became dark. And, there were three hours of darkness and three hours of light when Jesus Christ was on the cross. How exacting is the Word of God!

Look at verse 2: *“I cry...”*—this is Psalm 22—*“I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent”* (Psalm 22:2). And then, continue to read. Skip down to verse 7 and look at the words of those who ridiculed the Lord Jesus when He was on the cross: *“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing that he delighted in him”* (Psalm 22:7).

Now, the Bible prophesied that when Jesus Christ would be crucified He would be laughed, mocked, ridiculed, and scorned. Go to Matthew 27, look in verses 39 and following: *“And they that passed by reviled him...”*—who? Jesus—*“...and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him”* (Matthew 27:39–42).

Incredible thing! These are not prophecies fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ; these are prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled by His enemies, those who have the least to gain by the fulfillment of this prophecy. Go to verse 14, if you will—look at it in Psalm 22: *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels”* (Psalm 22:14).

This is what the Lord Jesus says of Himself there upon the cross: *“I am poured out like water.”* Well, what does that mean? Well, turn to John chapter 19 and verse 34. When Jesus Christ was on that cross, they came and they broke the legs of the thieves, one on one side, and one on the other, to hasten death. But, when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, and John 19, verse 34, says, *“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water”* (John 19:34). *“I am poured out like water.”* And, incidentally, they tell us that when this condition takes place, that when there is that fluid there around the pericardium, the heart cavity, and the blood and the water flow out together, it is a sign that the victim has been under great, great duress. Jesus literally died of a broken heart. It poured out blood and water. And, as I studied this, I wondered if the things that break the heart of Jesus break my heart.

Then, I want you to notice, in verse 14 of Psalm 22, it says, *“All of my bones are out of joint”* (Psalm 22:14). What would that mean? My dear friend, when they crucified an individual, they nailed Him first to the cross, and then they took that cross and dropped it into a hole. Josephus, the great historian, the Jewish historian, tells us that when an

individual's body was nailed to a tree, nailed to a cross, was dropped into a hole, at that moment, the bones went out of joint, only to increase the pain. But, with what detail the Bible prophesies the Lord Jesus' crucifixion, as the very sockets of His body are twisted out of joint!

Then, the Lord Jesus Christ was filled with a blistering thirst. Look, if you will, in verse 15: *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws"* (Psalm 22:15). What is a potsherd? That's a broken clay vessel. When the potsherd is broken, then there is nothing but dried clay. The Lord Jesus was full of thirst there upon the cross, and I read in John chapter 19 and verse 28, *"Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst"* (John 19:28). Jesus had a ravening thirst in His body. But, Psalm 22, verse 15, says, *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws"* (Psalm 22:15). The Lord Jesus who made all of the oceans that we sang about a few moments ago, the Lord Jesus who made all of the rivers we sang about a few moments ago, the Lord Jesus who made all of the fountains that we sang about a few moments ago, that Jesus on the cross said, "I thirst." My dear friend, almost a thousand years before it happened, by divine inspiration, the prophet wrote down that the One who would be crucified for our sins would cry out in thirst.

Notice also how the Bible describes those who would perpetrate the crucifixion. Look, if you will, in verses 15 and 16 and following: *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."* Underscore *"thou."* And then: *"For dogs have compassed me:"*—underscore that. And then, in the last part of verse 16—*"the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me"* (Psalm 22:15–16).

Who crucified the Lord Jesus? God the Father crucified Him, as we're going to see: *"Thou."* The Gentiles crucified Him, as He speaks there of dogs. Do you know what the Jews call the Gentiles? Two-legged dogs. And, *"the assembly of the wicked"*: what's he talking about there? The Jewish council. And, there you have God the Father, the Gentiles, represented by Pilate, and the assembly of the wicked, represented by Caiphas. All of these are they who nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross.

And then, my dear friend, I want you to see how this One hanging on the cross was stripped of His clothing and hung there naked. Look, if you will, in verse 17: *"I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me"* (Psalm 22:17). That is, the Lord Jesus Christ is hanging there, absolutely, totally uncovered. Jesus Christ, who was perfect purity and undefiled modesty, was stripped naked to hang upon that cross. The Bible tells us that happened to Him, in Matthew 27, verse 28: *"And they stripped him"* (Matthew 27:28). They stripped Him and put on Him a scarlet robe. And Matthew 27, verse 36, says, *"And sitting down they watched him there"* (Matthew 27:36).

Sometimes I, and today, I'm going to ask those of you who will give your heart to Jesus to leave your seat and come forward openly and publicly and unashamedly to confess Christ as your personal Savior. And, some of you say, "Well, I don't want to go down there. There are too many people." Friend, Jesus Christ hung naked on a cross for you, unashamed, bearing your shame. Jesus was crucified for you. And, the Bible speaks of it here: *"I may tell all my bones."* There the Lord Jesus is hanging upon the cross, stripped. Look at it again, in verse 17: *"I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me."* Matthew 27, verse 36: *"And sitting down they watched him there"* (Matthew 27:36)—amazing precision in this Psalm. And then, look in verse 18: *"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture"* (Psalm 22:18).

There were four minor pieces of clothing that a person would wear at this time, and one major piece. And, the major piece would be an undergarment woven, a seamless robe. What would be done with that seamless robe? I can imagine four soldiers there, one of them saying, "You take this part. You take that one. You take this one. You take this one. What are we going to do with this one? I'll tell you what: let's roll the dice. Let's see who will get this one seamless robe." And, read there in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 35, *"And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots:"*—that is, rolling dice—*"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,"*—David is called a prophet here—*"They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots"* (Matthew 27:35). "You get this garment. You get this garment. You get this garment." And now, when it comes to that one seamless robe, they cast lots for that one seamless robe. Incredible, amazing thing! Look again, in verse 18: *"They part my garments among them, and cast lots [for] my vesture"* (Psalm 22:18).

Now, all I've done, my dear friend, is take a few—not all, but a few—of the incredible correspondences between what David wrote, I am telling you, 1,000 years before the crucifixion. *"They pierced my hands and my feet"* (Psalm 22:16). How did that come to pass? Do you think that is happenstance? Do you think that just happened? No, dear friend. Thank God for the incredible prophecy of the Word of God that foretold the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. That, my friend, is the prophecy of the cross.

II. The Agony of the Cross

Secondly, I want you to notice not only the prophecy of the cross; I want you to notice the agony of the cross. I want you to see the price that Jesus Christ paid for your redemption, that you might be here today, that you might be forgiven, that you might be saved, that you might be filled with the Holy Spirit, that you might have a hope that is steadfast and sure. How you ought to praise the Lord Jesus, and how you ought to serve the Lord Jesus, because of the suffering that He suffered! No one ever suffered like the Lord Jesus Christ. Others were crucified, but nobody ever suffered like Jesus.

And, I'll show you why.

Jesus suffered at the hands of three: He suffered at the hands of God; He suffered at the hands of men; and, He suffered at the hands of Satan. I want you to see it right here in this Psalm.

A. Jesus Suffered at the Holy Hands of God

First of all, He suffered at the hand of a Holy God. Now, look, if you will, in verses 1 through 5: *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Psalm 22:1). God the Father forsook God the Son. You say, "That's a mystery; I don't understand it." I can't understand it either, but I believe it. I believe that God the Father turned His back on God the Son. You see, we worship a Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus, on the cross, the third person of that Trinity, says, *"My God,"*—that's God the Father—*"my God,"*—that's God the Spirit—*"why hast thou forsaken me?"* God the Son, forsaken by God the Father and God the Spirit, alone there on the cross: why? Well, the question is answered by the Scripture. Look in verse 3, and you'll find out why He was forsaken: *"But thou art holy"* (Psalm 22:3).

Now, my friend, listen. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, He was the sin bearer. "Him who knew no sin, God hath made to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:22). And, my sin, your sin, their sin, our sin was placed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bible says of God the Father, in the Book of Habakkuk, that God's eyes are too pure to look upon sin. God cannot look upon sin. God turns His eyes, God turns His face, from sin. And so, the Lord Jesus Christ became the sin bearer. And, when the Lord Jesus Christ became the sin bearer, then, my friend, He had to suffer the penalty for that sin. And, a part of the penalty for your sin and my sin, if you don't get saved, is to be forsaken of God—God-forsaken forever in a devil's Hell. And so, Jesus, on the cross, said, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

He who had been in the bosom of eternity past is now forsaken of God the Father—when He's dying, when He's dying. My dear friend, when I am dying, I don't want to be God-forsaken. I don't want to be God-forsaken at any time. King David, who wrote this Psalm, said of himself in the next Psalm, in Psalm 23, speaking of himself, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"* (Psalm 23:4). But, my dear friend, when Jesus Christ died for you, Jesus walked that lonesome valley all by Himself. And, He had to say, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

But, look in verse 15, if you will, the last part of verse 15: *"Thou hast brought me into the dust of death"* (Psalm 15:22). Who crucified the Lord Jesus? God the Father crucified Him. God the Father put Him to death. You say, "Well, I don't understand that." Well, my dear friend, when Jesus Christ became the sin bearer, then Jesus Christ took

the sin penalty. And, the sin penalty is death. *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). You can read in Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 10 concerning the Lord Jesus, *“It pleased the LORD to bruise him”* (Isaiah 53:10). It pleased Jehovah to bruise the Lord Jesus Christ. And, I read there in Romans chapter 8 and verse 32 that God *“spared not his own Son, but delivered him up”* (Romans 8:32). Who delivered Him? God delivered Him. Who failed to spare Him? God failed to spare Him. Who forsook Him? God forsook Him. Who delivered Him to the dust of death? God the Father. And, He who had been in the bosom from eternity past now is forsaken of the Father and has become the object—the object—of the Father’s wrath and the center of the Father’s loathing—the Son of God.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought what Jesus Christ took for you, my dear friend? That Jesus Christ took your Hell. Jesus took your punishment. Jesus took the wrath, the fire, of God upon Himself. No wonder He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, *“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”* (Matthew 26:39)—“let it pass from me.” Who crucified the Lord Jesus?

B. Jesus Suffered at the Hateful Hands of Man

Number one, dear friend—the agony of the cross: He died at the hands of God. But, not only at the hands of God, my dear friend, the holy hand of God, but also the hateful hand of man. Look, if you will, in verses 6 and following here. The Bible says, *“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people”* (Psalm 22:6)—“I am a worm.” Who is a worm? Jesus. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation”* (Psalm 22:6–7). Have you ever gotten that low? Have you ever said to yourself, “I am a worm”? A worm? A worm? A worm? He who made everything, a worm? You step on a snake, he’ll strike back. You step on a worm, you’ve just stepped on him. Like a worm—a worm.

The worm spoken of here probably was the crimson crocus, a worm, when crushed, from which they made dye, crimson dye. The same word that is used for worm is used in Isaiah 1:18: *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as...crimson,”*—same word that’s used—*“they shall be as wool.”* Thank God. His crimson blood for our crimson sin, that we might be washed whiter than snow. *“I am a worm.”* He suffered at the hands of men. They stepped on Him like He was a worm—like He was a worm. The very Son of God shed blood.

You know, the Bible tells us we had better be very careful that we don’t trample under our feet the precious blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:29). I don’t know of a greater sin than to deal lightly with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Some years ago, I heard of a father who was a businessman. At his desk, he

received a phone call. They said, “Sir, we hate to tell you this, but there’s been an accident. A young man has been hit by an automobile. We don’t have all of the details, but we believe he’s your son.” He said, “Where is he?” And, they gave him the street corner—it was near his office. He said, “I’ll be right there.” He ran out of his office, got in his automobile and drove to this particular place where his son, according to the report, had been hit by an automobile. When he got there, he saw the crowds, as they were starting to disperse. He said, “Where’s the boy that was hit? Where’s my son?” Someone, not knowing the situation, said, “Oh, you mean the boy that was killed.” He said, “What?” “Oh, yes, the boy who was killed.” He said, “Is he dead?” He said, “Yes, he’s dead.” He said, “Tell me about it. What happened?” He said, “Well, a car hit him.” “Where did it hit him?” “Right there.” And, he looked, and there was a pool of blood right there in the street, a pool of blood he knew was his son’s blood. And, the automobiles there on that busy street were driving right through that blood; one car after another, driving right through that pool of blood. When that father looked at it and realized that was the blood of his own dear son, he couldn’t take it. And, he ripped off his coat, and he stood in front of it. And, he said, “Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop! You’ll not drive through my son’s blood like that. You can’t do it—the blood of my son.”

I wonder, my dear friend, what we do with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don’t understand the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 29: *“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”* (Hebrews 10:29).

C. Jesus Suffered at the Hellish Hands of Satan

Oh, my friend, Jesus, the Son of God, suffered at the hands of God—at the holy hands of God. He suffered at the hateful hands of men. And, He suffered at the hellish hands of Satan.

My dear friend, look at verses 19 and following, in this same Psalm. We see here, oh, he says, *“Be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog”*—hell’s dogs. *“Save me from the lion’s mouth”* (Psalm 22:19–21). Who is the lion? Who is the roaring lion? It is Satan himself, who goeth about like a roaring lion, *“seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). All the artilleries of hell were let loose upon the Lord Jesus when He was on that cross; all of the powers of the pit were concentrated upon the Lord Jesus.

Luke chapter 22, verse 53—Jesus said, when He was facing the cross, *“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness”* (Luke 22:53). What He meant was the power of

Satan, the power of the enemy. And, hell had a holiday, and demons taunted and tormented the Lord Jesus when He was on the cross. God-forsaken, attacked by Satan, abused by men, Jesus suffered, Jesus bled, Jesus died for you at the holy hand of God, the hateful hand of man, the hellish hand of Satan.

That's the agony of the cross—that's the agony of the cross. How can we sit unmoved? How can we ignore such love? How can we go idly our way when Jesus Christ paid that price for us? You say, "Well, did He really take my Hell? He was only there for six hours on the cross." My dear friend, in six hours, Jesus suffered everything you'd suffer for eternity. He, being infinite, suffered in a finite period of time, what you, being finite, would suffer in an infinite period of time. The sins of the world were distilled upon Jesus, and eternities were compressed upon the Lord Jesus. And, the Bible says concerning Him, "There is no sorrow like my sorrow" (Lamentations 1:12). No one ever suffered—no one ever suffered, no one ever suffered—like Jesus—no one.

III. The Victory of the Cross

There's the prophecy of the cross. My dear friend, there's the agony of the cross. But, I thank God for Psalm 22 that tells of the victory of the cross. It's all there—it's all there. What a Psalm it is!

Now, in Psalm 22 and verse 22, the tone changes. In the first 21 verses, the Psalm is going down, down, down, down, and then all of a sudden it begins to rise and come up, because there is a resurrection. Look, if you will, he says, "*I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel*" (Psalm 22:22–23). Jesus Christ is presented in the Bible as prophet, priest and king. And, right here in these verses you are going to see Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king.

A. Jesus as Prophet

As prophet, He declares the Father. Look in verse 22, if you will again. He says, "*I will declare thy name...*"—God the Son is speaking to God the Father—"*I will declare thy name to my brethren:*"—you know who He's talking about, folks? Us. Us. Oh, bless His name—"*in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.*" Jesus says, "I'll praise Thee, Father." "*Ye that fear the LORD, praise him...*"—Jesus is talking to you now. I hope you know hope to praise Him. Jesus is saying—"*Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.*" And then, He says, in verse 25, "*My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation*" (Psalm 22:25). What is all this talking about? The writer of the Book of Hebrews knew what He was talking about. Just put in your margin Hebrews 2, verses 11 and 12: "*For both he that*

sanctifieth”—that’s Jesus—*“and they who are sanctified are all of one:”*—that’s us; we’re the ones that are sanctified—*“for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,”*—He’s not ashamed to call you His brother. I’m next of kin to the Holy Trinity—*“saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”* (Hebrews 2:11–12). Did you know that when you gathered here this morning to sing Jesus is out there singing? Did you know that? When I’m preaching, Jesus is preaching. When you’re singing, Jesus is singing. He says, “In the midst of the church, I will sing praises.”

Brother Tommy Lane, if people only knew what was happening in a song service. Jesus said, in Matthew 18, *“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). Christ meets with His people. Christ sings with His people. Christ praises with His people. He is the One who declares the Father. He’s the One who makes God the Father real. He says, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

B. Jesus as Priest

So, He is the prophet. And, as the prophet, He declares the Father. But, not only is He a prophet; He’s a priest. And, as a priest, He delivers the faithful. Look in verse 26: *“The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever”* (Psalm 22:26). What does the priest do? He offers the shewbread, that represents Jesus, who is the bread of life. And, Jesus feeds His people. Oh, my dear friend, Jesus delivers His people. He is here today to give you the bread of life.

C. Jesus as King

This One who died for you, He is prophet. He is priest. And, I love this next part. Oh, my dear friend, He is king. As prophet, He declares the Father. As priest, He delivers the faithful. But, oh, my dear friend, as prince, He dominates the future. Look, if you will, in verse 27: *“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD:”*—listen to it; listen to it—*“and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD’s”* (Psalm 22:27–28)—*“the kingdom is the LORD’s.”* He is prophet to declare the Father. He is priest, oh, my dear friend, to deliver the faithful. But, He is a prince and a potentate, oh, my dear friend, to dominate the future.

Conclusion

People say, “What’s the world coming to?” I’ll tell you what the world’s coming to: it’s coming to Jesus. Jesus owns this world. It was made by Him, and for Him, and the Bible says He’s coming back to it. You read Colossians chapter 1, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 11:15). And,

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdoms stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

—ISAAC WATTS

He is prophet, to declare the Father. He is priest, to deliver the faithful. He is prince, to dominate the future. His name is wonderful: Jesus. Don't you love Him? Don't you love Him? He who did so much for you? My dear friend, it was written in a book almost a thousand years before He ever got here. What a Savior! What a Savior!

The Best Is Yet to Be

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 30, 1997

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”*

PSALMS 23:6

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Certainty of the Best That Is Yet to Be
- II. The Company of the Best That Is Yet to Be
- III. The Constancy of the Best That Is Yet to Be

Conclusion

Introduction

The twenty-third psalm is a psalm that we all go to when our hearts are hurting. And, I want you to go to that psalm with me tonight. Most of you know it by heart, but I’m going to share it with you again. And then, I want to talk about one verse—the last verse in that psalm.

David, that sweet singer of Israel, said, *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”*—now, he doesn’t say, “The Lord is a shepherd,” or even “a good shepherd.” He is both of those, but he says, “The Lord is my shepherd,” and it’s that personal pronoun that makes the difference. You cannot say, “I shall not want” until you can say it and mean it: “The Lord is my shepherd.” The rest of the psalm is a list of the things we will not want for if and when we say, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Say it and mean it: “I am His and He is mine forever and forever”—*“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He”*—the Lord—*“restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”*—notice he’s been talking about Him, and now he’s talking to Him in the valley—*“thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over”*—and then, here’s the verse that I want us to dwell on tonight—*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and”*—in addition—*“I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”* (Psalms 23:1–6)

Now, I want to talk to you tonight on this subject: “The Best is Yet to Be”—“The Best is Yet to Be.” Learn this principle: Satan always gives the best first, the worst last. Jesus always saves the best for the last. Have you ever noticed that? For example, in Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 17, the Bible says, “[*The*] bread of deceit is sweet...but [afterward a man’s] mouth shall be filled with gravel.” (Proverbs 20:17) Sweet at first—a mouthful of dirt at the end. That’s the way Satan does.

The whole advertising principle is built upon that. Have you ever seen that old Milwaukee ad with those guys in the bass boat? They just caught a big bass, and now they’re sitting around the campfire. And, one of them holds up part of a six-pack of embalming fluid, and he says, “Boy, it just doesn’t get any better than this.” And, he’s right—it doesn’t get any better. It goes downhill from there. I mean, it gets worse. It’s... He doesn’t... They don’t show the drunk in the gutter. They don’t show the broken homes. They don’t show the ruined lives. They don’t show the bloody carnage on the highway. Satan always paints a pretty picture. “[*The*] bread of deceit”—that’s what that is. That’s the bread of deceit—“*is sweet.*” (Proverbs 20:17)

But, Satan has no happy old people. He’s got a lot of happy young people. I used to say, “You can’t have any fun in sin.” I stopped saying that ’cause it’s a lie. A lot of young people are having a rip-roaring time. They are having fun. And, the Bible speaks of “*the pleasures of sin,*” (Hebrews 11:25) so why shouldn’t I be honest and speak of the pleasures of sin? Sometimes we mistakenly, trying to reach young people, say, “You can’t have any fun doing that. There’s more fun serving God than there is serving the devil.” And, they look at some of us who don’t look like we’re having much fun, and they’re having a blast; and they just don’t believe us. And, we shouldn’t say that there’s no pleasure in sin when the Bible says there’s pleasure in sin. (Hebrews 11:25) But, the Bible says that “*the pleasures of sin [are] for a season.*” (Hebrews 11:25) And, mark it down: while the devil has a lot of fun-loving young people who are kicking up their heels, he doesn’t have any happy old people.

You see, when a person gets older, the pleasures of the flesh become erstwhile, and they may cling to a few, like overeating or a few things like that, you know. Maybe he’s an old duffer who plays golf. But, by and large, what almost old people are looking forward to is rheumatism, and headaches, and pain, and arthritis, and doctor bills, and weakening strength, and sloughing shoulders, and dimming eyesight, and winding on down to the grave. I mean, we say, “Hey...” One by one their friends begin to die, and they say, “You know, that’s coming for me after a while.” And, if they don’t know the Lord, they get cynical, they get bitter, because what you are now is what you will be in intensification later on. It all settles in the bottom of the cup. And, I tell you, there’s nothing meaner than a mean old person. I mean, don’t get romanticized ideas about old people—that they’re all sweet. Some of them are mean as a snake. I mean, old

people—oh, they are, because all they... You just have that vile...that bitterness that settles in the bottom of the cup. But, I'm going to tell you something else: the sugar also settles in the bottom of the cup. The sweetest, most wonderful and most beautiful people are older people who walk with the Lord. There is a beauty and a radiance about people who...as you see their lives culminate, because with Jesus it gets better and better and better. With Satan it does not get better and better. That's the reason...

We see that illustrated in the wedding feast when Jesus turned the water into wine. And, the master of ceremonies said unto him, in John chapter 2, verse 10: *"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk"*—it doesn't say when they are drunk; it means when they have drunk all they wish, when their appetites are sated—*"then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."* (John 2:10)

When I was a boy, I was walking through the alleyway behind Northwood Baptist Church. I was not a Sunday School boy. I heard them singing a song. The title of that song was "Every Day with Jesus is Sweeter Than the Day Before." And, I was a youngster, but I was a philosopher. And, I said to myself, "That is not true. There's a limit to everything." So, if you've lived with Jesus for a while, it may get sweeter and sweeter and sweeter 'til it reaches the saturation point. Then it can't get any sweeter. And, I just thought, "Nothing gets better all the time. Everything has a limit," 'til I got saved and I found out that song is true—that song is true. Jesus is sweeter to me today than He was yesterday. I really believe that. And, every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.

*There is more—so much more—than that first sweet day;
More, so much more with each passing day.
And, the life I now live—Christ is living in me
In each word, in each deed, in each day.*

—BOB OLDENBURG

Now, when I say that it gets better, it doesn't mean that it is not good now. That's what the psalmist is saying. I want you to listen to what he says: he's saying, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."* (Psalms 23:6) Now, that's good—that's good. But then, notice the plus on the end: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and"*—in addition to this—*"I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."* (Psalms 23:6) I've often said I'd be a Christian if there were no heaven just to know Jesus Christ, if all I had in this life was goodness and mercy—goodness for my needs and mercy for my faults. Isn't that we need—goodness for our needs and mercy for our faults? Those follow us all the days of our life. But, it is all of this and heaven, too.

Now, but notice what it says: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me"*—

what?—“*all the days of my life.*” (Psalms 23:6) You know what the psalmist had enough sense to know? That his life was made of days, that his life was not made of infinity—not on this green planet. There’s the days of my life. That’s the reason the psalmist said in Psalms 90 and verse 12: “[*Lord,*] *teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” (Psalms 90:12) It’s the days of our life. We do not live here forever. And, when we do, we know the Lord. We can say, “*Goodness and mercy [will] follow me.*” (Psalms 23:6) But, when we die, we can say with the Apostle Paul, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is*—what?—“*gain*” (Philippians 1:21)—not loss. We talk about the loss of life. It is not the loss of life when a person dies—not if they know the Lord. It is gain.

Now, there are three things I want you to learn about this gain, this life, this house of the Lord, this best which is yet to be, where my daddy is right now tonight. And, things that I’m telling you I’m just telling me—I just want to reinforce tonight. And, you just give me an opportunity to talk to me a little bit tonight, and you can just eavesdrop if you want. But, there are three things that the psalmist said in this verse.

I. The Certainty of the Best That Is Yet to Be

And, first of all, as we think about the best that is yet to be, I want you to think of the certainty of it. Notice what he says. He says, “*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*”—and the *surely* is still applying—“*and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*” (Psalms 23:6) And, what he’s saying is, folks, that’s sure—that is certain. You don’t have to—you don’t have to—guess about that.

“Well,” you say, “That was David. He was an Old Testament prophet. Do we have anything better than that?” Well, let’s try Jesus. Jesus said the same thing in John 14, verses 1–3, where He says, “*Let not your heart be troubled: [you] believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions*”—it’s the house of the Lord that David was talking about—“*In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you*”—Jesus Christ, who was truth incarnate, would never have left the hope of heaven beating in the human breast had it been mere sentimentality or mere delusion. He said—“*If it were not so, I would have told you. I go [and] prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*” (John 14:1–3) A place—where? There. Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is a place. Heaven is not a condition. Heaven is a place. Heaven is a place more real than Memphis, Tennessee.

Actually, the Bible always speaks of heaven as “up.” Some have made fun of us for believing that heaven was up, because they say, “Well, heaven may be that way here, but it’s that way in Australia. So, which way is up?” You say, “Up is here. And, if you’re in China, Australia, up is there. So, which way is up?” Did you know there’s one place

that's up always, and that's north? "Up north." Did you know that our entire solar system revolves around the North Star? If you would take a camera lens and just put it on the North Star and open up, you would see it. It'd look like all of the heavens just revolve around that one star, which is a fixed position. It is not by accident that people everywhere say, "Up north."

And, the Bible teaches that heaven is somewhere in the north. As a matter of fact, in Leviticus chapter 1, verse 11, when God is telling Moses how to make the Levitical sacrifices—the animal sacrifices—He said, "And when you pour out the blood, pour it out on the north side of the altar toward the Lord." (Leviticus 1:11) That's a very interesting verse. Or, or, you might put this one down: in Psalms 75, verses 6 and 7, he says, "*For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge.*" (Psalms 75:6–7) It's very interesting. Where does it come? It comes from the north. What did Satan say when he rebelled against God in Isaiah chapter 14? He said, "*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit...[in] the congregation, [on] the sides of the north.*" (Isaiah 14:13) There's something, I think, very real about heaven—so real that I believe it has a definite direction.

Jesus said, "*I go to prepare a place for you.*" (John 14:2) Now, you say, "But, I think it's a spiritual place." Jesus is there in a resurrected body. Enoch is there in a body. He walked with God, and God took him. Elijah went to heaven in a body, in a whirlwind, in a chariot of fire. Heaven is a real place. I believe in a solid heaven. The Bible says Abraham dwelt in cities and tents, but "*he looked for a city [that had] foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*" (Hebrews 11:10) You say, "Well, that's too physical for me." What do you have against something physical? God made this universe. Do you think He—do you think He—did something wrong when He made it? Was God sinning when He made it? No, God made this universe, and God stepped back and God said, "It is good." (Genesis 1:31)

Now, you can go to heaven—however, a real place in a spiritual form. "*God is a Spirit,*" (John 4:24) and He's here—real—tonight in this place. And, you can go to heaven in a spirit form. My daddy's in heaven tonight. His body will be buried Friday, but my daddy is in heaven tonight. Listen to this scripture—2 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 5 through 8: "*[Wherefore] we are always confident, knowing that, [while] we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, [and] not by sight:)*"—nobody here has seen Jesus by sight, yet we walk by faith. But now, listen—"*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*" (2 Corinthians 5:6–8) One day—one not very long ago; yesterday, really—my dad was there playing shuffleboard. And, he was good at it. He'd say, "Son, I'll show you how to put them in the kitchen." He was good at it. There he is. The next moment he's absent from the body and he's present with the Lord—present with the Lord. And,

Paul said that's what it is. We just move out of this body.

I remember reading down Acts chapter 7 about Stephen, who was stoned—that first Christian martyr. And, Stephen said, *“Behold, I see [heaven opening]”*—he saw heaven open—*“and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”* (Acts 7:56) His body was going down into the earth, but his spirit was going up to meet the Lord in heaven. Many of saints have had a vision of heaven before they went. The former pastor of this church—one of them—Dr. R. G. Lee, had a wonderful vision of heaven before he went there. And, this is a place. It... *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD.”* (Psalms 23:6) Jesus said, *“In my Father's house are many mansions.”* (John 14:2)

“Well, Adrian, what is heaven like?” I don't know. You don't know. None of us know. *“It doth not yet appear,”* (1 John 3:2) the Bible says clearly. We have some ideas; we have some illustrations. But, it is the presence of all that is good; it is the absence of all that is evil. It is all that the loving heart of God, the omnipotent hand of God, and the omniscient mind of God can conceive. Put that together, and that is heaven. It's... Heaven is the place created for those for whom Jesus...those that Jesus loved enough to die for them. Now, that's the certainty of it.

II. The Company of the Best That Is Yet to Be

Now, here's something else I want you to think about: not only the certainty of it, but I want you to think of the company of it. *“I will dwell in the house of the LORD.”* (Psalms 23:6) That is, God has a big house—many mansions. (John 14:2) And, in the Bible, when the Bible would speak of the house, it doesn't mean the building alone; it means the people. The Bible speaks of the house, or *“the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) Think of those who are going to be there in heaven. I have a son in heaven, and now I've got a daddy in heaven. And, they are getting acquainted, because my son died when he was a baby. David's little son died. David mourned, but David said, *“Now [he's] dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but [he'll] not return to me.”* (2 Samuel 12:23)

You know, when you get older, the more of your friends step over on the other side, after a while, you get more over there than you've got over here. And, you just...you're looking forward to heaven. And, there's going to be a wonderful company in heaven. Don't get the idea that we won't know each other in heaven. Folks, we don't know each other here. In heaven, we will know one another. We will know as we are known. We do not lose our identity in heaven. When Moses and Elijah came from heaven to appear with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses was Moses and Elijah was Elijah just like Jesus was Jesus. We don't lose our identity.

And, the Bible teaches that up in heaven there's just a shining cloud of witnesses,

and all of the redeemed of all of the centuries are there; but they're all singing the same song, praising the same Savior. And, very frankly, if it weren't for work to do down here, I wouldn't mind cutting out and going right now. I mean that with all my heart. I have no fear of death—absolutely none. And, I don't look forward to dying. I have no fear of death. I mean, you know... But, you got to go through something to get to something. Everybody wants to go to heaven; nobody wants to die. But, I have no fear of death—none—because Jesus has taken the sting out of death, the pain out of parting, the gloom out of the grave. He's given a hope that is steadfast and sure. And, think of the company that we'll have. Moses will be there. David, who wrote this psalm, will be there. I'll ask David to sing and play it for me and play it on a harp. And, John will be there. I'll say, "John, would you finally explain the book of Revelation to me?" How will it be to have a Bible conference with Paul teaching the book of Romans? How would you like that? Simon Peter will be there, and he'll tell us what it was like to walk on the water. And, our saints, our brothers, our sisters, our fathers, our mothers are going to be there. The Bible says that we're to comfort one another with these thoughts. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

III. The Constancy of the Best That Is Yet to Be

And, last thing I want to say, and I'm... Don't want to go too long tonight. But, there is the certainty of it: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me."* (Psalms 23:6) There's the company of it: *"I will dwell in the house of the LORD."* (Psalms 23:6) And folks, there's the constancy of it: *"I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"—"for ever"* (Psalms 23:6)

You know, David was a shepherd and a nomad, and sheep were constantly moving. And, he thought of himself as a sheep, but he's thinking, "One of these days, I'm going to settle down." Hebrews 11, verse 8—listen to it: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which [had] foundations, whose builder and maker is God."* (Hebrews 11:8–10) No more moving, no more surprises—we're going to heaven to live there forever.

Conclusion

Question: Are you going to heaven? I was sitting in Northwood Baptist Church. I'd been a rebellious teenage boy, skipping school, getting in fights, cheating in class, using bad language, telling lies—and that's the good part. And, I was doing that—a teenage boy breaking my mom and dad's heart. But, somebody loved our family enough that they

invited us to go to a revival meeting. Now, I had a respect for God, I want to tell you—I did. And, I wasn't maybe as bad as I'm putting on, but I was a sinner and I was lost. And, somebody invited our family to a revival meeting. I can remember—I was out in the front yard raking grass. My dad, my brother, and I were cleaning the front yard. I see that family as they're coming, walking right up there—stopped right by the driveway, the peat rock and the gravel going up this way. My dad went over to talk to them. They told my dad about the revival meeting up there at Northwood Baptist Church, three blocks away, and invited us to come. I saw my dad nod his head and say he would come. And so, if he went... He said, "Family, we're going to go to church." "Fine!"

So, we went and sat in that church. I'm sitting right there, my dad on the aisle. I'm sitting next to him. Evangelist Fred Brown preached the gospel. And, he gave an invitation, and my dad stepped out and went down that aisle. I was amazed. I mean, I had no idea he was even listening. I don't know what the man said. I wasn't listening. I might have been listening, but I don't...I haven't got the faintest idea what he said. But, my dad stepped out and went down that aisle, and the Holy Spirit put His finger on my heart and said, "Adrian, you need to be saved—you need to be saved." And, I stepped out after about the next stanza and went down there. And, they said, "We're glad that Adrian has come tonight," and they filled out a card and said, "Why are you coming? Are you coming to trust Christ?" I said, "Yes, I am." They filled out a card. And, I really meant business. My dad was saved, and I really believe I was saved right there.

They didn't instruct me as much as they should have or could have, so for about two years I was on a spiritual rollercoaster. Sometimes I would think I was lost, and sometimes I would think I was saved, because I didn't have the scriptural knowledge. But, one night, I got it settled, and I said, "Lord, if I never was saved, I'm trusting you tonight. If I was saved, this can't take it away. But, once and for all, now and forever, I give you my heart; I give you my life." That was many, many years ago. And, my dad, who gave his heart to Jesus that night, became a Sunday School teacher, became a deacon in our church, and lived for God every day since that day. And now, he's gone to heaven.

Now, I want to ask you a question: If playing shuffleboard tonight, or going home tonight, or whatever tonight you drop dead, do you know that you know—can you say it and mean it—*"Surely goodness and mercy [have followed] me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"*? (Psalms 23:6)

Father, I pray that you would just seal the message to my heart and our hearts. And now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if you're not certain that you're saved, would you—would you tonight, right now; let's just get it settled—would you just forget what people think and quit making excuses, and would you just right now pray a prayer like this: "Lord, I'm the one who needs you tonight. I need that assurance. I need

salvation. I want to be saved, O Lord Jesus. I trust you tonight, right now, like a little child, once and for all, now and forever, I trust you, Jesus. And, because I trust you, I'll not be ashamed of you. Because I trust you, I will make it public. I will give you the glory. I will acknowledge you as my Lord and Savior”?

The Secret of Satisfaction

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 21, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:1

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

PSALMS 23:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. God the Sovereign
- II. God the Shepherd
 - A. The Good Shepherd
 - B. The Great Shepherd
 - C. The Chief Shepherd
- III. God the Satisfaction
 - A. The Seven Names of God
 - 1. Jehovah Raah
 - 2. Jehovah Jireh
 - 3. Jehovah Rapha
 - 4. Jehovah Shalom
 - 5. Jehovah Tsidkenu
 - 6. Jehovah Shammah
 - 7. Jehovah Nissi
 - B. The Relationship Between Sheep and Shepherd
 - 8. A Personal Relationship
 - 9. A Permanent Relationship
 - 10. A Protected Relationship

Conclusion

Introduction

I've been preaching the gospel for many years, but I have never preached a series of messages on the 23rd psalm. I intend to do so, God helping me, in the weeks that we have before us. Today, we're going to be looking at Psalm 23 and verse 1. In a moment, we'll read the entire psalm. And, the entire series is going to be dealing with this subject: "The Secret of Satisfaction."

I want to ask you a question: How many truly, truly satisfied people do you know? You know, people can have all of the things of this world and not be satisfied. John Muir, the great naturalist, was speaking to a Mr. Harriman. Mr. Harriman was a railroad

magnate, and industrialist, a financier, a man of great wealth and great influence. And, John Muir said to Mr. Harriman, “I am richer than you are.” He said, “Well, how is that?” He said, “Because you don’t have all you want, and I do. So I am richer than you.” And, well, indeed, the Bible says, “*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver*” (Ecclesiastes 5:10). But, it’s not just money that can’t truly satisfy. There’s nothing really that can satisfy apart from our Lord.

I heard about a little boy who loved pancakes so much he sometimes made a glutton of himself over pancakes. And, his mother thought that she would cure him one day, and she said, “John, I’m going to fix you all the pancakes you can eat.” Well, he thought that was a deal, and she got the griddle out and began to fix pancakes. And, he ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate, and ate till finally she said, “John, do you want another pancake?” He said, “No ma’am.” He said, “I don’t want the ones I’ve already had.”

Now, that so well illustrates what I’m talking about, which is that in the deepest recesses, whether it be in the viscera, in the stomach, in the heart, or in the mind, there are hungers that people are seeking to satisfy that they can never, ever, really satisfy. And, even when they think they’re satisfied, even that satisfaction is a dissatisfaction, as with the pancakes. What I’m trying to say to you, dear friend, is that there is a secret of satisfaction that is more than just a play on words, and it’s found here in this wonderful 23rd psalm.

Now, there’s a danger, and here is the danger: that when we get into the 23rd psalm, we’re on such familiar ground that we say, “Oh, I know that.” And, the proverb “Familiarity breeds contempt” may never be more true, because we all are familiar with the 23rd psalm, and it’s perhaps the best-known passage of Scripture in all of the Bible. And, well it ought to be, because it’s such a gem of literature. I believe it’s one of the seven wonders of the literature world, but it is given by divine inspiration. And, not only is it beautiful; it is magnificently true. It is no wonder that it’s been quoted in the nursery school and on the battlefield. It is no wonder that it has been quoted at weddings and funerals. It is no wonder that it’s sweet to a little child and yet perplexing to a scholar.

You know, it’s said of the Word of God that the Word of God is deep enough that the scholars can come and swim without ever touching bottom and yet shallow enough that a little child can come and drink without fear of drowning. That is certainly true of the 23rd psalm—a magnificent, wonderful passage of Scripture. And, we know it by heart, many of us. It says, “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest mine head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and*

mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:1–6).

A beautiful psalm—we're only going to look at the first verse. And, it will be a marvel, really, if we even touch on the truth that's in the first verse. We could take every word in the first verse and just emphasize each word. "*The LORD*" (Psalm 23:1)—not a Lord, but *the* Lord. When David wrote this, the Egyptians had 360 primary gods—one for every day of the week. The Canaanites, in whose land the Israelites came to live—they had many gods. But, David knew: there is but one God, the Lord. We could put the emphasis on the word *Lord*: the great Sovereignty, eternal God, the King that we've been singing about, the One who rules over all.

"*The LORD is*" (Psalm 23:1)—we could put an emphasis on the word *is*. When I was in Florida about 20 years ago, I heard the great black preacher, S. M. Lockridge, preach on the Lordship of Christ. And, he quoted this verse, and he stopped right there, when he said, "*The Lord is*" (Psalm 23:1). And, he began to talk about that little word *is*. And, he said this: "The Lord always has been *is*, and the Lord always will be *is*." I like that. He was talking about the eternity, the un-changeability, the immutability of our great God. He said, "You can't keep your tenses straight when you talk about our God."

"*The LORD is my*"—and then we could just pull over, and park, and talk a long time about that little word—"my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Not the Shepherd, not a great shepherd, a good shepherd—He's all of that—but *my* shepherd. And, we could talk about the personal relationship with our Lord. We could talk about the word *shepherd* and put the emphasis upon *the Lord is my shepherd* and how He is the One who is responsible for every care that the sheep might have. And, that's where we're going to look—in this first verse—this morning, and find the secret of satisfaction.

I. God the Sovereign

First of all, I want you to notice that phrase "*The LORD*" (Psalm 23:1). And, I want you to think of our sovereign God—the Lord, our sovereign God. You notice, if you have a *King James Version* of the Bible, that the word *Lord*—L-O-R-D—is in all caps—that is, it is in all capital letters. Is yours that way—L-O-R-D in all caps? You see, the reason it is there is to tell us that this word, translated "Lord," is a translation of an Old Testament name for God. That is the most sacred name for deity that the Jews had, and it is the word *Jehovah*—*Jehovah*. And, every time you see it in all caps, it means "Jehovah."

And, you can say, "Jehovah is my shepherd," and the name Jehovah was such a sacred name. It was the self-existing, the One who never had a beginning, the One who never has an ending, the great I AM. "Jehovah is my shepherd." That name was so sacred to the Jewish people that some Bible historians say it was only pronounced one time a year. And, it was pronounced at that time—that only time a year—when the high

priest would go into the Holy of Holies and whisper the name, “Jehovah.” The Jews fairly never spoke that name audibly. When a Jewish scribe was translating the Scripture, when he’s writing the Scripture, when he would come to the word *Jehovah*, he would put down that pen and get a brand new pen—just to write the name *Jehovah*, the great awesome covenant-keeping God, the self-existing One, the great I AM, the Lord, the Lord. *“The LORD is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1).

Now, you have to understand what David is saying when he’s saying, “Jehovah, the great One, is my shepherd.” Evangelist Angel Martinez has a way with words. I want you to hear what he said about Jehovah. He said, “The Lord, the One who made the world and everything that is in it, the One who lit the paper of the sun and put the stars in their places—that’s my Shepherd. The One who threw a carpet of green grass upon the earth and tacked it down with the flowers, the One who scooped up the valleys and piled up the hills, the One who took the song of the seraph and robed it with feathers and gave it to the nightingale, the One who took the rainbow and wove it into a scarf and threw it about the shoulders of a dying storm—that’s my Shepherd. At evening time, He pulls down the shade of the night and shoots it through with sunset fire—that’s my Shepherd.” So, first of all, as we look at verse 1 (Psalm 23:1), we see what I’m going to call “the sovereign God”—Jehovah; the great, great, great I AM; the One who rules the universe.

II. God the Shepherd

Now, notice, in contradistinction, what David is saying: *“The [great Jehovah] is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1). Now, we move from the sovereign to the shepherd. Learn this: that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New Testament. When we say, “Jehovah,” we speak of His deity; but when we say, “Shepherd,” we speak of His humanity. In John chapter 10, the Lord Jesus unlocked the mystery of the 23rd psalm when He said, *“I am the good shepherd”* (John 10:11; John 10:14). You want to know who David was talking about? *“I am the good shepherd”* (John 10:11; John 10:14)—the Sovereign, the Shepherd. He is deity; He is humanity. You see, in the Lord Jesus...oh, here’s the wonderful thing about our salvation: in the Lord Jesus, we have sovereignty and sympathy, a King and a Shepherd, sovereignty and sympathy, a God who is able, a Shepherd who is available, a God in the heavens and a Shepherd in our heart. *“The LORD [Jehovah] is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1).

A. The Good Shepherd

Three times in the New Testament the Lord Jesus is described as Shepherd. He is described, first of all, as a Good Shepherd. Now, in John chapter 10, verse 11, Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd”—“the good shepherd”—“the good shepherd [layeth*

down] his life for his sheep” (John 10:11). Now, any shepherd may lose his life for the sheep—that isn’t what Jesus said. Jesus said, *“The good shepherd [lays down] his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11).

Did you know that there’s only been one person who ever chose to die? Only one. “Oh,” you say, “no, suicide pilots choose to die. Other people choose to die. People who die by their own hand choose to die. People who give themselves for others—they choose to die.” No one has ever chosen to die but Jesus, because He was the only One who didn’t have to die. All the rest of us are going to die sooner or later. Some people may just choose to die a little sooner, but nobody has chosen to die except One; and that was Jesus, who laid down His life for the sheep. He said, “No man taketh my life from Me. No man can kill Me. I lay it down.” (John 10:18) It wasn’t nails that held Him to the tree. It was the silver cords of love and the golden bonds of redemption that held Jesus Christ to that cross.

And now, we’ve often heard of sheep dying for the shepherd when he wants mutton or when he wants food. But, whoever heard of a shepherd dying for a sheep? Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd that lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11). You say, “It’s unthinkable that a shepherd would die for a sheep.” It’s more unthinkable that God would die for man. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep.

Now listen, when, as the Good Shepherd, He laid down His life for the sheep, He dealt with the penalty of sin. *“For the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23), and that’s what Jesus Christ paid. *Your sin will be pardoned in Christ or punished in Hell, but it will never be overlooked.* Unless there’s a good shepherd who has died for your sins, you sir, you lady, are going to have to face the wrath of an angry God at the judgment with your sins un-atoned. He’s the Good Shepherd.

B. **The Great Shepherd**

But now, wait a moment. Not only is He shown in the Bible as the Good Shepherd, in John 10 (John 10:11), but He’s also shown in the Bible as the great Shepherd. Look, if you will, in Hebrews 13, verses 20 and 21—wonderful passage: *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus [Christ]”—*what does that mean, *“that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ”*? “That raised Him from the dead.” He’s speaking of the resurrection—*“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect”—*that is, “mature”—*“in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever”* (Hebrews 13:20–21). Now, in John 10, He’s called the Good Shepherd (John 10:11): He died for the sheep. But, in Hebrews chapter 13, He’s

called the great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20): He rose for the sheep. I mean, listen, it speaks now of the resurrection.

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20). What good is a dead shepherd? He’s no good at all except that he pays the penalty for the sheep’s sin. *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6). Yes, He carried our sins to the cross. Therefore, He took care of the penalty of sin. But, when He rose from the dead, He now deals with the power of sin. He not only is the Good Shepherd—He had to be good to die for our sins—but He’s the great Shepherd: He rose from the dead. That makes Him the great Shepherd.

C. **The Chief Shepherd**

And, the Bible says, now, He’s able to lead us *“in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”* (Psalm 23:3). Not just that He died for me, dear friend—He lives for me. And, that deals with the power of sin. But, wait a minute—He’s also called the chief Shepherd. Now, in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 4, the Bible says, *“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”* (1 Peter 5:4). And, there you have the ministry of our dear Lord. As the Good Shepherd, He had to be good to do it. He died for our sins. As the great Shepherd, He had to be great to do it. He rose to take care not only of the penalty of our sin, but the power of our sin. And then, as the chief Shepherd, one day He’s coming to take us from the presence of sin. One day, He’s coming to take us out, folks.

And, I tell you, the more I read the papers, the more I listen, the more I look around, the more I believe it must be soon. I believe our Lord is at the door, and I believe that the chief Shepherd is about to appear. I believe He’s about to call His sheep upward. I believe He’s about to say to us, “Come on now. I’m the chief Shepherd. You follow Me.” You see, He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Jehovah is our Shepherd. He is the chief Shepherd.

You know, one of the things that is so beautiful about the Bible are the little signs of inspiration that you find that are really great signs when you see them. For example, you have here Psalm 22, 23, and 24, back to back, right? Now, that’s obvious, okay; that’s not profound. Twenty-three follows 22, okay, and 24 follows 23. You’ve a trinity of psalms. But, in Psalm 22, you find the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 is written as if a man were standing at the foot of the cross. The gambling for His garments, the words that He would say on the cross, the piercing of His hands and His feet, the words of His enemies—all of this is found there in Psalm 22. In Psalm 22, what do you see, therefore? The Good Shepherd dying for the sheep. But, in Psalm 23, what do you find?

You find the great Shepherd leading His sheep, the One who is alive, risen from the dead. And then, in Psalm 24, what do you find? You find the chief Shepherd coming for His sheep.

You see, in Psalm 24, this is the Lord coming in. Look, if you will, in verse 7: *“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The [Jehovah] of hosts, he is the King of glory”* (Psalm 24:7–10). Isn’t that beautiful? In these three psalms, you see the Good Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the chief Shepherd. The Good Shepherd—He died to pay for the penalty of sin. The great Shepherd—He rose to take care of the power of sin. And, the chief Shepherd—who is coming again to appear in Glory to take us away from the very presence of sin. I love this, as we see this wonderful, wonderful Shepherd-King that we have.

III. God the Satisfaction

But now, wait a minute. I said I was going to talk to you about the secret of satisfaction. That’s what this verse is about, and this verse is the key to all of the rest of the psalm. You see, every passage of Scripture has a key to understanding it. And, in Psalm 23, the key is hanging right on the front door; the key is in this verse: *“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1). You have the Sovereign—that’s Jehovah. You have the Shepherd—that’s Jesus. Jesus is the Jehovah-Shepherd of our lives. And that, my dear friend—the Sovereign plus the Shepherd—leads to the satisfaction. *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1). That’s the only way that any one will ever have satisfaction. You will never, ever, ever, ever, ever, have even a modicum of satisfaction until you can mean it: *“The LORD is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1). ’Tis only when you say that, that you can say, *“I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1).

So many people think that the secret of satisfaction is having a God that can give you everything. That is not the secret of satisfaction. The secret of satisfaction is the Lord Himself. *“[Jehovah] is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1). You see, your needs will never be met until they’re met in Him. Things will never satisfy you—things will never satisfy you.

So many people misunderstand Psalm 37, which says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He’ll give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). They think that means, “If I love Jesus, I can have a pink Cadillac.” That isn’t what that means—“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desire of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). What that means is when you delight in the Lord, the deepest needs of your heart will be met. The desire of your heart is Jesus. That’s what your heart yearns for; that’s what you were made

for—for Him. The Bible says it is in Him that “*we live, and move, and have our being*” (Acts 17:28)—in Him. You’ll never be satisfied apart from Him, ’till you can say, “The Lord is my shepherd. It’s not what He gives me, but He Himself.”

What did God make a fish to do? To swim in the sea. What did God make a bird to do? To fly in the sky. Now, you take a fish out of the sea and put him in a tree, and he’ll be an unhappy fish. You take a bird out of the sky and put him in the sea, and he’ll be an unhappy bird, because both are out of their element. What is the element that you were created for? God Himself. And, until you know Him, you will be like a fish in a tree, like a bird in the sea. You’d be out of your element; you’d be like a square peg in a round hole.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
What the heart yearns for, by sin undermined;
I have the secret, I know where ’tis found:
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound.
Jesus is all this poor world needs today.
Blindly [men] strive, for sin darkens their way.
O to [pull] back the grim curtains of night,
One [look] at Jesus and all will be bright!*

—HARRY D. LOES

When a man can say it and mean it: “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*” (Psalm 23:1)...

A. **The Seven Names of God**

Now, let me show you what David did: David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, took the sacred name Jehovah, and he welded it—or melted it—to another name: “[*Jehovah*]...*my shepherd*”—“[*Jehovah*]...*my shepherd*” (Psalm 23:1). The Hebrew says, “Jehovah Raah”—“Jehovah Raah.” That’s one of the names of God. Did you know there are seven times in the Bible where the name *Jehovah* is conjoined to another word to make a new name for God? Let me give you these seven. They will bless you. Are you ready?

1. Jehovah Raah

Number one: Psalm 23—Jehovah Raah, “Jehovah my shepherd.”

2. Jehovah Jireh

Number two: Genesis 22—Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Jireh. What does that mean? “The Lord my provider. The Lord will provide.”

3. Jehovah Rapha

Then, here’s the third one: Jehovah Rapha—R-A-P-H-A. That’s “the Lord that heals”

(Exodus 15).

4. Jehovah Shalom

Here's the next one: Jehovah Shalom. You know what the word *shalom* means? It means "peace," and it means "the Lord our peace." It's one of the names of Jehovah.

5. Jehovah Tsidkenu

And then, here's another one: Jehovah Tsidkenu. That's spelled T-S-I-D-K-E-N-U. It simply means "the Lord our righteousness."

6. Jehovah Shammah

And then, Ezekiel 48 gives us Jehovah Shammah—S-H-A-M-M-A—"Lord ever-present."

7. Jehovah Nissi

And then, Exodus 17: Jehovah Nissi, "the Lord our banner." That's the reason why Jim Whitmire has had these banners built—the Lord banner.

All right. Now, those are seven names for deity. Are you ready for a blessing? Now, you can understand a little bit what David meant when he said, "*The LORD is my shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1). Listen to this: "*The LORD is my Shepherd*"—who is that? That's Jehovah Raah—"I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). Who is that? Jehovah Jireh, "the Lord will provide." "*He restoreth my soul*" (Psalm 23:3). Who is that? Jehovah Rapha, the Lord that heals. "He leads me beside the still waters. He makes me lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2). Who is that? That is Jehovah Shalom, my peace. "He [leads] me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). Who is that? That's Jehovah Tsidkenu; that is the Lord our righteousness. And then, "*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*" (Psalm 23:5). Who is that? That's Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our banner. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, then shall the Lord hold up a banner before him" (Isaiah 59:19). "*I will fear no evil: for thou art with me*" (Psalm 23:4). Who is that? Jehovah Shammah, the Lord ever-present. What David was saying is this: that "*the Lord is my shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1), not the things that He gives me. The things that He gives me are only a representation of who the Lord is Himself.

Now, a question: Is the Lord your shepherd? Is the Lord your shepherd? Well, I'll give you a clue as to how you can find out. Do you want to know? You really want to know whether the Lord's your shepherd or not? I'll tell you how you can find out: Is the Shepherd your Lord? That's the way. You see, the only way that you can say, "The Lord is my shepherd," is for you to be able to say, "The Shepherd is my Lord." Not everybody can just stand up and quote the 23rd psalm and claim it for their own.

Turn with me for just a moment to John chapter 10. Let me show you what I'm talking about. In John chapter 10, the Lord Jesus is talking to the unsaved Pharisees, and He says in verse 26: "*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you*" (John 10:26). Now, there are some unbelievers who are not part of the sheep.

Now, if you're not part of the sheep, it's impossible for you to say, "The Lord is my shepherd," if you're one of Satan's goats. "The Lord is my shepherd" only if you can say, "The Shepherd is my Lord."

B. The Relationship Between Sheep and Shepherd

Now, notice the description of a person who can say, "The Lord is my shepherd."

8. A Personal Relationship

Verse 27: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27). When you say, "My Shepherd," the Shepherd says, "My sheep." And, a sheep is someone who hears His voice, someone that He knows, someone that follows Him. Have you heard His voice? Have you received Him as your personal Savior and Lord? You see, my dear friend, it is a personal relationship with the Shepherd. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27).

9. A Permanent Relationship

Not only is it a personal relationship; it is a permanent relationship. Notice in verse 28: *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (John 10:28). Now, any earthly shepherd is going to lose some sheep. But, the Good Shepherd has never lost one—never lost a sheep. *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (John 10:28). You say, "Pastor, do you believe in the eternal security of the believer?" I do. "Why do you believe in the eternal security of the believer?" I believe in the eternal security of the believer because of John 10, verse 28: *"I give...them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (John 10:28).

Hey, you're looking at a man who can't die. You say, "Oh sure, you can die." No, I can't. It is impossible for me to die. Jesus said, *"[He that] liveth and believeth in me shall never die"* (John 11:26). "Well," you say, "what if you die?" If I do, I won't be dead—I won't be dead. All I will have done is to move out. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life"* (John 10:27–28). Eternal—how long is eternal? Never ends—never ends. These people who believe you can get saved and then lose it... Suppose I were saved for ten years and then lost it—what kind of life did Jesus give me? A ten-year life. I mean, if I had it 50 years and then lost it, I had 50-year life. Friend, whatever it is, if it's eternal and you ever lose it, it wasn't eternal. Whatever it is, if you ever lost it, whatever you had wasn't eternal. But, Jesus didn't say, "I might give them..." He said, *"I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (John 10:28).

10. A Protected Relationship

It is a personal relationship. *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"* (John 10:27). It is a permanent relationship, and the reason it is permanent is because it is a protected relationship. Look, if you will, in verse 29: *"My Father, which*

gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28). My dear friend, when you get saved, you come into the almighty hand of an Almighty God. "[Jehovah] is my shepherd"—"[Jehovah] is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Do you think that Shepherd's going to lose sheep? He can't. "*I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish*" (John 10:28). My friend, if you got it by works, then you can keep it by works; but if you got it by grace, you're kept by grace. We're saved by the grace of God. "*I give unto them eternal life*" (John 10:28).

A little girl misquoted the 23rd psalm, but I believe she had it just right when she said, "The Lord is my shepherd. I've got all I want"—"I've got all I want." That, my dear friend, is the secret of satisfaction. It is Jehovah Himself. "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*" (Psalm 23:1). In Him—in the shepherd—are the wellsprings of my heart's desire.

Conclusion

Every head is bowed, please; every eye is closed—no one looking, no one moving about. Would you begin, if you're a child of God, to pray right now for those who may not know Jesus? Would you pray, dear God, for those who—today—have never believed on Him? Help them to do it right now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed. The Lord is the Good Shepherd: He laid His life for the sheep; He died for you. The Lord is the great Shepherd: He rose again from the dead to guide you and to lead you. When you give your heart to Jesus, He doesn't just say, "All right, sink or swim." No—He comes to guide you and to lead you in the paths of righteousness, to keep you. And friend, He's the chief Shepherd: He's coming soon—He's coming soon—and you need to be ready.

Would you pray a prayer like this and invite Him into your heart? Just talk to Him: "Dear God"—just speak to Him, right now—"Dear God, I know You love me. I know that You want to save me. Jesus, I was like a sheep going astray, but You died for me. You paid my sin debt. Thank You, Lord Jesus—thank You, Lord Jesus—that You paid my sin debt. Lord Jesus, I believe that You were raised from the dead"—tell Him that—"I believe that You were raised from the dead, and that you are the Son of God with power, and that You're able to lead me in the paths of righteousness for Your name's sake, because You're a living shepherd. Come into my heart, right now"—ask Him—"Come into my heart, right now. Take control of my life, and make me the person You want me to be. And, Lord Jesus, I know that You are the chief Shepherd, coming soon, and I want to go home to be with You. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You for saving me. I just receive You now as my Lord and my Savior. Thank You for saving me."

And then, would You pray this? "Lord Jesus, help me never, never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen."

How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 2, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:1–6

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

PSALMS 23:6

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Certainty of Heaven
 - A. Heaven Is a Present Place
 - B. Heaven Is a Perfect Place
 - C. Heaven Is a Purposeful Place
 - II. The Company of Heaven
 - III. The Constancy of Heaven
- Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and find Psalm 23, as we come, this morning, to the last of these six verses that have blessed our hearts as we’ve studied them together. We’ve taken each morning for a verse, and now we’re going to read all six of them together: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever”* (Psalm 23:1–6).

Satan gives the best first and the worst last. Would you agree with this statement? Satan has no happy old people. I agree with it. Satan has no happy old people. He has some happy young people. The kids, for example, who are living high, wide, and

handsome have a certain modicum of fun of what we might call “happiness.” But, Satan has no happy old people. I’ll tell you why—here’s a principle, and I want you to learn it: Satan always gives the best first and the worst last—he always gives the best first and the worst last. For example, Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 17: *“Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel”* (Proverbs 20:17). That is, Satan always starts sweet, but it doesn’t end that way. Satan is a counterfeiter; he is a deceiver, and he certainly is guilty of false advertising.

I see these fellows out there in a bass boat, the Old Milwaukee boat. You know, they’re out there. They’re hoisting the suds, and they’ve just caught the fish. Or, they’re frying the fish, or they’ve just come in from a great volleyball game. And, these good buddies are sitting down having a rollicking good time, and one of them will hold up a wet one. And, he’ll say, “It doesn’t get any better than this.” He’s right: it always gets worse. You know, it doesn’t get any better than this. I mean, he doesn’t show the drunkard in the gutter covered with flies. He doesn’t show the carnage on the highway. He doesn’t show the blasted lives and the ruined home. He always gives the best first and the worst last. Satan doesn’t have any happy old people.

Dr. Jess Moody of California wrote these words. I think they’re tremendous, so I jotted them down. He said—and I quote: “I note among other plans that Mrs. Madeline Murray, the famous atheist of Baltimore, Maryland, who reputedly has made fun of churches for attempting to raise money, is trying to raise money. She plans the establishment of an atheist university, and an atheist printing plant, and an atheist radio station. But, the most interesting of her plans is a home for aged atheists. What do aged atheists have to talk about while they sit around waiting to die? Do they discuss the legacy of morality, decency, integrity, and spiritual sensitivity that they’ve bequeathed to their children? Or, do they discuss the good that atheism has done the world, the hospitals, the orphanages, the elevation of womanhood, and the mass distribution of decent literature? Or, perhaps they discuss the great bulwark against communism that atheism has erected. Then, when the sun is sinking low, and conversation for the wheelchair atheists begins to lull, they can joyously contemplate their future. There’s so much for an aged atheist to look forward to.” Then, he concludes with this line: “Old atheists never really die. They just go to hell.” You see, Satan gives the best first and the worst last. Jesus gives the best last.

Remember at the wedding feast when Jesus had turned the water to wine, and the master of ceremonies came out, and he said, “I don’t understand this”? He said, “Most people give the very best first, but you’ve saved the best till the last” (John 2:9–10). That’s the way Jesus always does it. With Jesus, it keeps getting better and better. And, every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before, and there’s more—so much more—than that first sweet day.

Now, that doesn't mean that it's not good now, but it means it gets better. What the psalmist is saying is, "It's good now"—"*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*"—"it's good now"—"*surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever*" (Psalm 23:6). The best is yet to be—goodness and mercy. Here's the sheep, and the sheep is looking over its shoulder; and it sees two sheepdogs. Job called them "the dogs of my flock"—two sheepdogs, goodness and mercy, who are just following the flock everywhere the flock goes (Job 30:1). "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*" (Psalm 23:6).

I remember an interesting story that took place when Dr. Harry Ironside was pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. He told about it in some of his writings. He said that he had a lady, a poor dear lady, who lived by herself and was haunted by a fear. She had a phobia, a fear, that there were two men who followed her everywhere that she went. She came to see the pastor about it because she was so worried. She said, "Pastor, I have a problem, a very serious and terrible problem." He said, "Well, what is it?" She said, "There are these two men. Everywhere I go they follow me. When I go to the grocery store, they follow me. When I get on the streetcar, they get on the streetcar behind me. When I come home, there they are right behind me. They're always behind me, constantly following me." He said, "Have you told the police?" She said, "Yes, but they say they're not there, but I know they're there—always there." He said, "Oh, you're a most blessed woman; you're a very fortunate woman. Don't you know who those two men are?" She said, "No, do you know?" He said, "Oh, yes—they're David's friends." And, he turned to Psalm 23, and he read it: "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*" (Psalm 23:6).

He said, "Those two men—one has a name: Goodness. And, the other's name is Mercy. And, God has sent them to follow you all of the days of your life." She said, "Pastor, that's wonderful. And, to think, all of this time I've been afraid of them, and God has sent Goodness and Mercy to follow me." She was so happy. Every day when she would go, get on the streetcar, she'd wait for Goodness and Mercy to get on. She'd get on. When she'd come home to her apartment, she'd open the door and let Goodness and Mercy go in, and then she went in. And, she lived the rest of her life until she stepped on over into the other side in perfect happiness with no more fear.

You say, "Well, was the pastor right to tell her that?" Well, friend, would to God that all of us could understand that in a very real way—that goodness and mercy follow us all of the days of our lives. Every one of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ could write a book about God's goodness and God's mercy. God gives us goodness in the good times and mercy in the bad times. God gives us provision for our failure and provision for our need. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life, but praise God—the

best is yet to be.

And, I want to tell you how to make the rest of your life the best of your life—the very best of your life. Now, here, the psalmist talks about the house of the Lord. Do you see it? *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever”* (Psalm 23:6). And, I want to tell you three things about the house of the Lord that came to my heart as I contemplated and thought about this and prayed over it. And, there are many things we could talk about when we talk about heaven, but I just want to talk about three of them:

I. **The Certainty of Heaven**

The very first thing, as we talk about the house of the Lord, that I want to lay on your heart and help you to get excited about is what I want to call “the certainty of it”—“the certainty of it.” Look at that verse: *“Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD”* (Psalm 23:6). Do you see it? *“Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD”* (Psalm 23:6). No *ifs*, *ands*, and *buts* about it—it’s a sure thing. One of the sweetest passages in all of the Bible is that passage in John chapter 14, where the Lord Jesus Christ reiterated, underscored, and ramified what David said when Jesus said in John chapter 14, verse 1: *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me”*—He’s talking about the same place that David was talking about—*“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you”*—now, let me just pause right there and say that Jesus Christ was truth incarnate. He never lied. He always told the truth. And, He said—*“if it were not so, I would have told you”*—Jesus Christ would not let the hope of heaven go beating within the human bosom if it were simply a lie, a superstition, or a fond delusion. He said—*“if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that’s where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:1–3).

So, let me say this about the certainty of it: that this place called heaven is just that—it is a real place. It is not merely a state of mind. It is not a condition. It is a place more real than Memphis, Tennessee. It is a place so real that Jesus is there in a literal body. There is a body in this place called heaven. It is His resurrected body. heaven is a place on God’s map.

A. **Heaven Is a Present Place**

Now, I want to talk to you, dear friend, about the reality of it. You know, we speak of heaven as being “up.” And, sometimes people who doubt the Bible laugh at us and say we’re a little wrong on our cosmology because we talk about heaven as being “up.” “In Memphis, Tennessee, heaven is *that way*. But, in Australia, then heaven is *that way*.” And so, they say, “Which way is it?” It all depends on which side of the globe that you’re

on. But, my friend, listen: the Bible writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. And, when they said that Jesus was taken up into heaven, we look up to where our possessions lie. Listen, the Bible knows what it's talking about.

There is one place on the globe that is always up, and that's North. It is not by accident that people speak of "up North" and "down South" wherever we are. There is that Polar Star. There is that northern fixed direction that is always there, and the compass always finds that north place.

Now, it may surprise you to know that the Bible speaks of heaven as being in the north. Let me give you some scripture; you may want to jot these down. Isaiah chapter 14, beginning in verse 13, tells about Lucifer who rebelled against God and tried to exalt his throne and place his rule where God's rule is. And, listen to what Lucifer said—Isaiah 14, verse 13: *"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north"* (Isaiah 14:13). That is very clear.

Now, when God told Moses how to make a sacrifice way back there in the Levitical system, He said that when Aaron goes to kill an animal... In Leviticus chapter 1, verse 11: *"And he shall kill it on the side of the altar northward before the LORD"—"northward [toward] the LORD"* (Leviticus 1:11). Do you see that?

I'll give you another verse: Psalm 75:6–7. God is revealing to us a great truth about how God honors His people and when God honors His people. And, he says this: *"For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another"* (Psalm 75:6–7). What direction did he leave out? The North. And then, he mentions God. Upward motion doesn't come from *that* direction. It doesn't come from *that* direction. It doesn't come from *that* direction. It comes from *that* direction—from the north. You see, there is a place in the north somewhere that I believe is heaven. Now, it is above the stars of God. Somewhere there is a place.

Paul went there. He called it "the third heaven." And, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 2, he said, *"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth)"*—now, listen to this—*"such an one caught up to the third heaven"* (2 Corinthians 12:2). Very interesting—he calls it "the third heaven," and he says you can go there out of the body or in the body. Jesus is there in a body. Some people are there without a body, but they'll have a body later on. But, he said this person was caught up to the third heaven.

The Bible mentions three heavens: the first heaven by day, the second heaven by night, and the third heaven by faith. The first heaven is the atmosphere. You know, the Bible speaks of the fowls of the heaven. They fly in the air, so that's the first heaven—the atmosphere, the clouds, the place, the envelope of the air that envelops the Earth

And then, there's the second heaven that's called...the stars are called "the hosts of heaven," which is the stellar vast reaches. We call that "the starry heavens." That's the second heaven. But, above the stars of God, beyond the stars of God, there is a place called heaven; it is the third heaven.

Someone has beautifully said, "We see the first heaven by day, the second heaven by night, and the third heaven by faith." Listen—"*I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever*" (Psalm 23:6). The Apostle Paul knew that heaven was a real place. Jesus knew that heaven was a real place. David knew that heaven is a real place. And, when a Christian dies, he steps right on into heaven, when the days of his life came to an end, when all the days of my life—and sooner or later, when the days of your life—are going to end. And, God, I don't know when that's going to be.

A little boy went off to war. His son was a little afraid of what danger he might face. He wrote him a note and said, "Dear Daddy, I love you. I hope you live all your life"—"I hope you live all your life." But, my dear friend, the days of your life are going to come to an end, and then, immediately, you're going to step into heaven, if you know the Lord. Listen to this Scripture—2 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 6 and following: Paul says, "*Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*"—right now, I live in a body. This body is not me. I'm just at home here; I'm at home in the body, but I'm absent from the Lord—"*(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)*"—I've not seen God, and neither have you. But, he goes on to say—"*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). Paul basically said, "If I had my choice, I would cut out and go to be with God, but I'm confident that the moment I die I'm going to be with Jesus."

In Acts chapter 7, there's the story of the death of one of the greatest men who ever lived. His name was Stephen. He was stoned for his faith. And, Acts chapter 7, verse 56—just before he died, he had a vision of heaven: "*And [he] said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*" (Acts 7:56). And, he prayed, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (Acts 7:59). Jesus told the dying thief, "*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43).

B. **Heaven Is a Perfect Place**

Now listen, heaven is a present place. Let me tell you something else about it: oh, my dear friend, it is a perfect place—it is a perfect place. Revelation 21, verse 4: "*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*" (Revelation 21:4). No more sin, no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more death, no more disease, no more dying, no more doubts, no more pain, no more

pain, no more groan, no more moan—these things are gone; they are passed away.

Now, sometimes people ask a question about heaven, and they say, “Well, now, really, what’s heaven going to be like? Are we going to have beds? Are we going to sleep on beds? Will we comb my hair? Will we eat? How old will we be? What will we do?”—you know, all of these kinds of questions. Folks, I don’t know, but that doesn’t bother me. You don’t know. He doesn’t know, and they don’t know—and they don’t know. And, you don’t know, and nobody knows. And so, don’t pretend you do know. For the Bible says, “*And it doth not yet appear what we shall be*” (1 John 3:2). You don’t have to know. Let me tell you what heaven is going to be like. Are you ready for this? Friend, it’s going to be the presence of all that is good and the absence of all that is evil.

Now, if that doesn’t satisfy you, let me give you something else. Heaven is going to be this, dear friend: it’s going to be all that the loving heart of God can conceive and the omnipotent hand of God can prepare—all that the loving heart of God can conceive and all that the omnipotent hand of God can prepare. That, my friend, is what heaven is going to be. Oh, it’s a present place. It is a perfect place.

C. **Heaven Is a Purposeful Place**

And, bless God, it is a purposeful place. Don’t get the idea that when you go to heaven, you’re going to get a woolly robe, a rusty halo, you’re going to sit around on a fluffy cloud and pluck a harp for all eternity. That’s not what heaven is. You don’t get that idea from the Word of God. The Bible teaches in Revelation chapter 22 and verse 3: “*his servants shall serve him*” (Revelation 22:3). Oh, how all of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ desire to serve Him better than we do!

Every time I preach, I say, “O God, I wish I’d have done better.” Every time we pray, we say, “Lord God, why isn’t there more power in my prayer?” I suppose every singer that ever has sung would wish that they could sing with more power, with more tears, with more unction, and with more beauty to give God the glory. We have this old sin flesh that holds us down, but one of these days we’re going to serve Him like we’ve never served Him before.

Brother Jim, I was thinking this morning about the choir in heaven. And, according to Revelation chapter 5 and verse 11, there’s going to be a choir up there of “*ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands*” (Revelation 5:11) of voices. I know Jim’s just waiting to get his hands on that choir. One hundred million voices—all of them in perfect harmony, praising our great God. And, what a time these musicians are going to have! But, Jim doesn’t know something. At least, he needs to learn that he’s not going to be the chief musician in heaven. You’re looking at the chief musician in heaven, because the Bible says, “*The last shall be first, and the first last*” (Matthew 20:16). And we, all of us, are going to be able to praise the Lord.

You see, my friend, this house of the Lord is a present place, a perfect place, and a purposeful place. Think of the certainty of it. This is what He said: *“I go and prepare a place for you”* (John 14:3). *“Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD”* (Psalm 23:6)—the certainty of it.

II. The Company of Heaven

But, think, secondly, not only of the certainty of it, but think of the company of it—the company of it. Notice what he says: *“Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD”* (Psalm 23:6). Now, when he means “house of the Lord,” he doesn’t mean “building of God.” There is *“a building of God...eternal in the [heaven]”* (2 Corinthians 5:1). But, that’s not what he’s talking about. He means “the household of God.” That’s what Jesus meant when He said, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions”* (John 14:2). That is, He’s saying that we, all of us together—all of the saints of all of the ages—are going to be there together, all of our brothers and sisters in Christ, all of those in the household of faith, the company of heaven. What a grand company it’s going to be!

That smart aleck Mark Twain is reported to have said, “I will take heaven for climate and hell for society.” Oh no, my dear friend. No—“I’ll take heaven for climate and heaven for society.” You talk about those who are going to be there in heaven. People say, “Will we know our loved ones in heaven?” Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, that’s the only place we will ever really truly know them.

Do you remember the story of David, who had a little son who died? He had an infant who died, and David fasted, prayed, cried, wept, and asked God to spare the life of the child while the child was sick. And then, the child died, and David got up and washed his face, anointed his body, and took food. And, I’m reading here in 2 Samuel 12: *“Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said”—listen to this now—“he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him”* (2 Samuel 12:21–23).

Do you have a little baby in heaven? Joyce and I have a little baby in heaven. And, I’m going to see Philip—I am. You call that sentimentality? I call it Bible truth, dear friend. Do you have a mom or a dad that has stepped over on the other side? We’re going over there to see them.

Every time a little baby goes to heaven, so many times I think of a story I heard years ago about a shepherd who had brought his flock to a turbulent stream. He wanted to lead the flock across the flowing stream, and they were afraid of the water. The wise shepherd took a little lamb out of the flock, put that lamb in his bosom, and waded

across that chilly stream, and set the lamb down on the other side. Over here was that mama sheep and that papa sheep. And, that mama sheep saw that little lamb on the other side, and that papa sheep saw that lamb on the other side. And, the old mother ewe started through the water to get to her little lamb. And, here came the father sheep, and here came the flock following behind. And, I think, so many times, God in His infinite wisdom sometimes takes a little lamb out of the flock and just sets it on the other side like He did David's little lamb. We don't understand all the mysteries of God, but we know one thing, dear friend: on the other side of those chilly waters of death is a place that has been prepared, and we can go and meet our loved ones there.

On the Mount of Transfiguration when Elijah and Moses appeared with the Lord Jesus Christ there, after they'd already died and had already gone to heaven, God brought them back to this world. And, the disciples were there at the Mount of the Transfiguration; and they saw Moses, and they saw Elijah. And, they'd never seen them before, but they knew them. They didn't have to be introduced. Moses was Moses. Elijah was Elijah (Luke 9:28–36). Yes, we'll keep our personalities. We're not going to be absorbed into nothingness. heaven is a place, and real people are going to be there. And, we will know our loved ones when we get to heaven.

Dear friend, Moses will be there. Won't it be something to talk with Moses about the wilderness wanderings? And, David will be there, and we'll say, "David, would you play Psalm 23 and sing it for us?" Won't that be something? And, David will say to me, "Adrian, you never did squeeze all the juice out of that psalm when you preached it. I want to tell you, you just touched the surface." And, for a few centuries, he can tell us about Psalm 23. And, the Apostle Paul will be there. How would you like to sit at the Apostle Paul's feet and have him teach the Book of Romans and talk about our great redemption and what our God has done for us? And, dear friend, John, the aged apostle, will be there, and he'll open all the mysteries of the Book of the Revelation. And, we'll know as we are known and see the mysteries of God when that book is opened and when the Lamb sits upon the throne. And, you know, Simon Peter will be there. And, I still think he'll have a big mouth, and he'll say, "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you? It will be glory unspeakable and full of joy" (1 Peter 1:8).

Listen, my dear friend, we are going to be there with the saints of all of the ages. But, that's not really what's going to make heaven. Listen: "*I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever*" (Psalm 23:6). That's what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord—to see the Lord Jesus Christ, to be with Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:6). He says, "Now, we live": "*For we walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

One of the great hymns that we sing says this:

Jesus, [Jesus,] the very thought of Thee

*With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.*
—BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

That's what the prophet Isaiah meant in Isaiah 33 and verse 17: *"Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty"* (Isaiah 33:17). That's what Jesus prayed in John 17, verse 24, when He prayed, *"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"* (John 17:24). What a time that's going to be!

III. **The Constancy of Heaven**

But, I want you to notice a third thing about this place called heaven: I want you to notice not only the certainty of it—*"Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD"* (Psalm 23:6)—and I want you to notice not only the company of it—the house of the Lord—I want you to notice the constancy of it: *"Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"*—*"for ever"* (John 17:14)—the constancy of it.

You see, sheep are nomadic, which means they always wander. And, if they're not wandering, they're being led by the shepherd beside the still waters, in the green pastures, through the dark valley, over hill and more—they're led (Psalm 23:2–4). They don't settle down and stay in one place. The Book of Hebrews talks about it. God doesn't intend for us to settle down here, because this world is not our home. We're just passing through. Hebrews 11, verses 8 through 10: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went"*—he didn't have to know—*"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise"*—now, notice he didn't settle—*"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles"*—that means "in tents"—*"with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"*—now, listen—*"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:8–10). I feel the same way.

One of these days I'm going to settle down. All of us here are just pilgrims right now. And, it's going to be a place of constancy, a place of constant joy, a place of constant service, and a place of constant praise. Have you ever thought about that? *"I will dwell in the house of the LORD"*—for how long?—*"for ever"*—*"for ever"* (Psalm 23:6). Have you ever thought about eternity? Have you ever thought about eternity, my friend—the length of eternity?

There used to be a great preacher who preached over in Arkansas; his name was Joe Henry Hankins—a mighty preacher. He wept when he preached. He pastored in Texas before he went to Arkansas. And, in Texas, upon one occasion, he had a woman

who gave her heart to Christ and was going to be baptized Sunday night in the church. She was married to a businessman. Joe Henry Hankins went by to see that businessman on Saturday to try to lead him to Christ. The man had no time for God, no time for Jesus, no time for church. But, Joe Henry Hankins went by the house and pled with this man, presented the plan of salvation, and begged this man to give his heart to Christ and to be baptized along with his wife. The man listened to the preacher's earnest plea, and then he said this to the preacher: he said, "Preacher, what you have said is right. I do need to give my heart to Christ. I do need to be saved. And, I promise you tomorrow morning when the invitation is given, I will come down that aisle, I will accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, and I will be baptized with my wife." The preacher said, "Great! That's wonderful! Praise God!"

And, he left the house, and he started out. He put his hand on the doorknob, and the Holy Spirit said to him, "There's something not right about that—there's something not right." He went back to this businessman. He said, "Listen, if you're going to do that anyway, let's get it settled now. You give your heart to Jesus now, and then you come tomorrow morning and make it public and then get baptized tomorrow night. But, let's get it settled now." This businessman said, "Preacher, I've got a reputation in this business, in this world, for keeping my word. I'm an honest businessman, and if I say that I'll do it tomorrow morning, you don't have to worry about it. I will do it. You have my word." He said, "Well, all right. Thank you. Praise God."

He started out and again. The Holy Spirit stopped him and said, "Go back and talk to that man." Joe Henry Hankins went back the third time, and he took with him this time his Bible. And, he opened it to 2 Corinthians 6:2 that says, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" He put it under his nose and said, "Pat, you read it. Pat, read it." He said, "Pat, that's God's Word. Satan says, 'Tomorrow,' but God says, 'Today.' Who are you going to listen to? Who?" He said, "Well, Preacher, I've been listening to Satan for a long time, and he's never brought me anything but misery. I'm going to listen to God." And, he got down on his knees with that preacher and gave his heart to Jesus Christ. He said, "Tomorrow I'll be there to make it public and get baptized."

The next morning when Joe Henry Hankins was standing on the front steps of his church, greeting the people as they were coming in, Pat's nephew came up and said, "Preacher, Uncle Pat has had a heart attack in the night, and he's at home; and he told me to tell you he's so sorry he couldn't be here. He intended to be here, but he's sick, and the doctor won't let him come." That noon, when Joe Henry Hankins was sitting at his noon meal, eating, the phone rang, and it was Pat's sister-in-law. She called and said: "Preacher, you need to know, the doctor... Pat has had another heart attack, and it's much worse than the first one. And, the doctor says that there doesn't seem to be

any hope.” Joe Henry Hankins said to himself, “Well, I’ll finish my meal and go right over there.” But, before he could get up from the table, the phone rang the third time. It was the sister-in-law again. She said, “Preacher, don’t hurry. Pat has died. He’s already gone. But, he said to tell you, ‘Thank you, and tell the preacher I’m sure glad I took God’s way rather than Satan’s way. I’m so glad I settled it. Tell Dr. Hankins thank you for causing me to say ‘yes’ to Jesus.’”

And, my friend, I want to tell you that eternity is a long time—eternity is a long time. And, when you die, you’re not going to have an opportunity then to get saved.

*Loved ones will weep o’er my silent face,
Dear ones will clasp me in sad embrace
[Darkness] and [shadows] will fill the place,
Five minutes after I die.*

*Faces that sorrow I will not see,
Voices that murmur will not reach me
But where, oh where will my spirit be?
Five minutes after I die.*

*Naught to repair the good I lack
Fixed to the goal of my chosen track,
No [space] to repent, no turning back
Five minutes after I die.*

*Mated [forever] with my chosen throng
Long is eternity, O so long.
Then woe is me if my soul be wrong,
Five minutes after I die.*

—BETTY STILLION SHINN

Can you say it? “*The LORD is my shepherd... Surely...I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever*”—“*Surely...I will*” (Psalm 23:1–6). Are you sure, if you died right now, you’d go to heaven? “Woe is me if my soul be wrong, / Five minutes after I die” (Betty Stillion Shinn)—“Jesus, save me now.”

Conclusion

Let’s bow in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Pray for those around you who may not know the Lord Jesus. Would you pray that people would open their hearts to the truth that “*behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2)? And, precious friend, if you want the Lord Jesus, and you want to be saved, let me help you to be saved right now. Let me help you to pray and ask Christ into your heart. May I? Would you forget that any one else is here, and just quiet your

heart now, and turn your heart toward God? He loves you. He wants to save you.

Would you pray this prayer: “Dear God, thank You for loving me. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me. Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God. I believe that You died on the cross to pay my sin debt. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for doing that. Lord, You said if I would trust You, You would save me. I do trust You, Lord Jesus”—would you tell Him that?—“I do trust You, Lord Jesus, right now, this moment, with all of my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus”—pray that; say it—“Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus”—ask Him—“Save me, Lord”?

And then, pray this way: “Thank You for saving me, Jesus. I receive it by faith.” Then, pray this: “Lord Jesus, I will not be ashamed of You. Lord Jesus, You died for me, and I will not be ashamed of You. Lord Jesus, I will acknowledge You as my Lord and Savior”—tell Him that; promise Him that, right now—“Lord Jesus, I will acknowledge You as my Lord and Savior. I will make it public to give You the glory. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

How to Handle Stress

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 28, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:2

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”

PSALMS 23:2

Outline

Introduction

- I. We're Stressed Because We're Like Sheep
 - A. Sheep are Dumb
 - B. Sheep are Defenseless
 - C. Sheep are Directionless
- II. How to Handle Stress
 - A. Security
 - 1. The Shepherd Is Compassionate
 - 2. The Shepherd Is Caring
 - 3. The Shepherd Is Courageous
 - B. Sufficiency
 - C. Serenity

Introduction

You know that we are preaching now through Psalm 23, and this is the second message on the second verse in that great psalm. Last Sunday, we talked together about the secret of satisfaction: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1). And today, we're going to be looking at verse 2: *“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters”* (Psalm 23:2). That's Psalm 23 and verse 2.

Now, the sheep in the Middle East get up and begin to graze and to browse about 4:00 in the morning. The shepherd begins to lead them out of the sheepfold, and the dew is still on the grass. It's very quiet, and the sheep will graze, browse, and nibble there. Then, about 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning, the sun is very, very hot; and if at all possible, the shepherd will find some secluded place—hopefully, some shady place—with green grass and allow the sheep to lie down. And, the sheep will lie down for three or four hours and just chew the cud. It's at that time when the sheep gets quiet—when the sheep get still and begins to digest that grass that it has ingested, to come up and ruminate or chew the cud. It's at that time that the sheep is growing the fastest; it's at

that time the sheep is putting on the fat, putting on the wool, maturing. And, every shepherd knows how important it is for his sheep to have a quiet time—every shepherd knows how important it is for his sheep to have a quiet time: *“He maketh me to lie down”* (Psalm 23:2).

I want to talk to you today about how to deal with stress, or how to handle stress. Is stress ever a problem to you? Nod your head. Be honest. Nod your head. So many folks I know are all stressed up and nowhere to go. You’re just tense, and frenetic, and running around, and so busy, so much in a hurry, and sometimes we think that it’s wrong for us to be quiet, to be still. I heard of a woman who called her pastor up, and she said, “Pastor, I tried to call you all day Monday, and I couldn’t get you.” “Well,” he said, “Monday’s my day off.” He said, “I was resting. I took a day off.” She said, “The devil never takes time off.” He said, “Yes, and if I didn’t, I’d be just like the devil.”

Now listen, folks, God wants His sheep to learn how to get quiet, and to lie down in the green pastures, and to drink from the still waters. They tell us that sheep don’t like to drink, and many of them will refuse to drink from rushing gurgling streams. There are plenty of streams like that in the Middle East, where the springs come up out of the mountainside and rush down through the ravine. But, the sheep are afraid to drink of that, but they will drink when the water gets in some quiet pool. So, *“he leadeth me beside the still waters”* (Psalm 23:2).

I. We’re Stressed Because We’re Like Sheep

Now folks, I want to talk to you about how to handle stress. You know the reason why we’re stressed? I’ll tell you why we’re stressed: because we’re like sheep. You know, Psalm 100 and verse 3 says, *“We are...the sheep of his pasture”* (Psalm 100:3). That’s how God describes us: *“we are...the sheep of his pasture”* (Psalm 100:3). You say, “Isn’t that wonderful? I’m a sheep.” Well, folks, God wasn’t necessarily trying to compliment us when He said we were like sheep. I mean, that’s not really a compliment. It’s a description—that sheep of His pasture.

A. Sheep are Dumb

I got to thinking about sheep and studying about sheep. I’ve been doing a lot of reading about sheep. And, I’m impressed, one more time, that a sheep is not the smartest around. As a matter of fact, a sheep is overloaded with dumbness—he really is. You go to the circus... How many of you have ever gone to the circus and see a trained sheep? You know, horses, lions, tigers, even pigs, but not a trained sheep. A sheep is really not a very intelligent animal. A sheep is an animal that just is not too smart.

“Well,” you say, “hey, I’m pretty smart. As a matter of fact, I graduated top of my class.” You misunderstand what I’m saying. I’m talking, now, in spiritual realms. Jesus

had to say to Nicodemus, who was very intelligent—he was a master in Israel; that is, he was a Pharisee. He was up at the top—but Jesus had to say to him, “Are you a master in Israel, and yet you don’t know these things?” (John 3:10). You see, he was intellectually up there; but spiritually, he was ignorant. The Bible says, “*There is none that understandeth...no, not one*” (Romans 3:11–12). In the spiritual realm, we’re like sheep, okay?

B. **Sheep are Defenseless**

All right. Not only is a sheep dumb, but I’ll tell you something else about a sheep: a sheep is so defenseless—so defenseless. Other animals—they can defend themselves fairly well. A horse can run. A mule can kick. A lion can bite. A tiger can claw. A bear can crush. A skunk—you know what he can do. A snake can strike. But, a sheep really doesn’t have any antlers. Horns are not much good to fight with. He can’t run. He has relatively weak muscles. He has poor eyesight. He doesn’t have good hearing. A sheep is pretty defenseless. As a matter of fact, the Bible speaks of as a lamb headed towards the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7)—just kind of defenseless. You think of sheep as needing someone to defend them. And folks, that’s the way we are. That’s the reason why the Apostle Paul had to say to the Corinthians, “*Our sufficiency is of God*” (2 Corinthians 3:5)—that is, we don’t have it in and of ourselves.

C. **Sheep are Directionless**

But, not only do you think of the defenselessness of sheep, and not only do you think of the ignorance of a sheep, but I’ll tell you something else about a sheep: a sheep doesn’t have good sense of direction; a sheep is easily lost. What does the Bible say in Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 6? “*All we like sheep have*”—done what?—“*gone astray*” (Isaiah 53:6). Sheep will browse here, nibble here, browse here, nibble here. He just gets further and further away, and he doesn’t know he’s getting further away. But, he gets further away from the flock, further away from the fold, further away from the shepherd; and then, he’s out there, and he’s lost. Now, it’s bad enough that he’s lost, but he can’t find his way home. The cows come back to the barn. The horse comes back to the stable. Did you ever try to get rid of a cat? They come home. You hear of a homing pigeon, but never a homing sheep. They don’t come back. They have to be sought; they have to be brought. That’s just the nature, folks, of a sheep.

And, what did God say about His people in Hosea chapter 11 and verse 7? “*My people are bent to backsliding from me*” (Hosea 11:7). You know what that means in plain English? “We have a tendency to get away from God.” Do you have one like that? Be honest. You look so holy this morning. Be honest. You have a tendency to get away from God. We sing about it, Bobby:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love.

—ROBERT ROBINSON

Now folks, that's the sheep nature. And, when you think about these things—when you think about the ignorance of a sheep and the weakness and the defenseless nature of a sheep; when you think about the propensity to get lost that's in a sheep and then you think about the dependency of a sheep.... A sheep needs somebody to take care of it. A sheep is so dependent.

Mr. Keller, who wrote a book about sheep, said that sheep sometimes can become what we would call *cast*—C-A-S-T. That is, it rolls over sometimes on its back and can't get up. Its paws are all up in the air, and it doesn't have enough athletic ability—it doesn't have enough dexterity—to roll over and get up. And sometimes, when lying down, it just finds itself with its paws all up in the air and cannot get back up on its feet. Now, that way it's vulnerable to the vultures, and to the wolves, and so forth. But also, the gasses begin to build up from the inside, and the sheep gets bloated; and before long, the circulation is cut off, and the sheep—that's called a *cast sheep*—will die. I think that's what David had in mind, when he said, "*Why art thou, cast down, O my soul?*" (Psalm 42:5). We get in a cast position, and the shepherd needs to come and pick the sheep up and put the sheep back on its feet.

Has He ever done that for you? I mean, when you were down and couldn't get up? Hmm? And, you couldn't get yourself up? Thank God for the Shepherd. You see—listen, folks—we are like sheep; that's why we have a tendency to be stressed. It's not necessarily a compliment to call us a "sheep," but it's a fact. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

II. How to Handle Stress

Now, having said that, how do you handle stress? Well, I believe verse 2 has a lot to say about how to handle stress: "*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters*" (Psalm 23:1–2). There are three things that are pointed out to me in this verse—of course, many, many more things than three, but three that I've chosen, this morning, to talk about.

A. Security

And, first of all, is the security we have in the Shepherd—the security we have in our Shepherd. I want you to say to yourself, "I am secure in Jesus." You see, "*He leadeth me*"—"He maketh me" (Psalm 23:2). Whom is the *He*? Jehovah my Shepherd. Remember that we said that Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New Testament? Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd*" (John 10:11). Jesus is the Good

Shepherd. Jesus is the great Shepherd. Jesus is chief Shepherd—we learned that last week—and because of that, I have security.

I was thinking today—also, of course, when I was preparing this sermon—about how our Lord Jesus Christ gives us security. He’s the One who makes us; He’s the One who leads us. Now, let me give you some characteristics of the Shepherd that I found in the Word of God.

1. The Shepherd Is Compassionate

The very first is compassion—compassion. Put this verse in your Bible: in Matthew chapter 9 and verse 36, the Bible says, *“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion...because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, [like] sheep having no shepherd”* (Matthew 9:36). When Jesus saw the people of His day, He saw them scattered, running frantic here and there, paling, fainting, complaining, full of stress. The Bible says *“he was moved with compassion”* (Matthew 9:36). Do you know what that word moved means in Matthew 9, verse 36 (Matthew 9:36)? It’s a very powerful word; it literally means, “to convulse, convulsed.” I mean, it has the idea of just hurting right in here. *“He was moved with compassion”* (Matthew 9:36). Do you know what the word compassion means? It comes from our English word meaning “with” and “passion,” meaning “to feel,” or “to suffer.” Jesus was convulsed as He felt with those sheep. He saw them as sheep having no shepherd. That’s what caused Him to leave Heaven and come and die for us.

2. The Shepherd Is Caring

As you think of the Shepherd, my dear friend, think of compassion. And then, as you think of the Shepherd, think also of care. Let me give you one of the most beautiful verses in all of the Bible: Psalm chapter 40 and verse 11—excuse me, Isaiah 40 and verse 11: *“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd”—we’re the flock; He’s the Shepherd—“he shall gather the lambs with his arm, [He shall] carry them in his bosom...[He] shall gently lead those that are with young”* (Isaiah 40:11). Isn’t that great? Aren’t you glad the Lord is so tender to us? Aren’t you glad that God gives us what we need and not what we deserve?

Has He ever carried you in His bosom? You know, when the lamb is weak and He takes these little baby Christians—those are the lambs. I see them join our church. They don’t know anything—many of them. Brand new Christians—they’ve come out of, some of them, out of almost sheer paganism. They don’t know anything. They come down here and give their heart to Jesus. We are so wrong to put them through a theological test. We are so wrong to say, “Now, you can’t do that; you must do this. And, why did you fail?” Jesus doesn’t do them that way. You know what Jesus does for the little lambs? He picks them up; He puts them in His bosom and carries them. And folks,

when I was a little lamb, thank God, He carried me. If He didn't, I never would have made it—I never would have made it. He didn't just say, "Rot, hang, or die." Oh, you see, He is compassionate, and He's a caring Shepherd. He carries us gently—gently.

3. The Shepherd Is Courageous

And, not only—listen—is He compassionate and caring, but here's another characteristic: He's a courageous Shepherd—a courageous Shepherd. I love that about our Lord. You remember reading there in John chapter 10? That's the great chapter that deals with the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd*"—then He said something very wonderful in John chapter 10 and verse 11. He said—"*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth*" (John 10:11–13). "*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11).

Now folks, the wolves are after meat, and they're after you. There were many, many dangers for the sheep in that day. There were wolves, and bears, lions, and thieves, who would come and slaughter and steal the sheep—wild dogs and scavengers of all kinds. Jesus said, "A false shepherd—one who's only paid by the hour, a hireling—he'll flee; he'll leave the sheep. But," He said, "a good shepherd will fight for his sheep" (John 10:11–13). I remember reading in the Bible about when the disciples said, "Jesus, don't You go to Jerusalem. Don't go down there, Jesus. It's dangerous down there. Jesus, don't go down there; they're going to hurt You. Jesus, if You go down there, they're going to kill You. Don't go to Jerusalem, whatever You do." The Bible says, "*[He] set [His] face like a flint*" (Isaiah 50:7) toward Jerusalem—just like that. The courage—the courage—of our Shepherd!

My dear friend, I want to tell you that when you understand you may be weak like a sheep—that you have a compassionate Shepherd, a caring Shepherd, and a courageous Shepherd... You see, "*The hireling [flees]*" (John 10:13). "*The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11). You see, in John 10, verse 7, Jesus said, "*I am the door*" (John 10:7) of the sheep. You say, "Is He the Shepherd, or is He the door?" The answer is "yes." The Shepherd becomes the door.

In that day—and I've been in and seen these sheepfolds—the shepherd will build an enclosure out of stones about *so high*—just a big circle or a square—and he brings all the sheep inside. That's the sheepfold. He counts them all and makes certain that they're all secure. And then, the shepherd has an opening about *that wide*, where the sheep come in and out. When he gets all the sheep in and all the sheep are counted, the shepherd will lie down right across that opening. Nobody gets in and nobody gets out without him knowing it. The shepherd is the door. "*I am the door*" (John 10:7). And, what Jesus is saying is that "nobody can get to you, except he comes through Me." Do

you like that? Brother, I like that. That's the reason He said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish"* (John 10:27–28).

You see, folks, listen—what you need in order to deal with this stress is, number one, security. *"He maketh me"—"He leadeth me"* (Psalm 23:2). I may be weak like a sheep, but He is the strong Shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd. That's the first thing I see in this verse—is security. And, that security helps me to deal with stress.

B. Sufficiency

I'll tell you what else I see: not only do I see security, but I see sufficiency. You see, look at it: *"He maketh me to lie down in brown withered pastures."* Is that it? *"He leadeth me beside muddy streams, dried-up water brooks."* Oh, no—*"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters"* (Psalm 23:2). All I need and more I find in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, why do we get stressed? Well, we get stressed because we think our needs are not going to be met. We just say, "Oh my goodness, I'm not going to have what I need."

Now, do you remember that passage over there in Matthew, where our Lord is telling us not to worry, and He says what people worry about? He said, "Well, don't worry about what you're going to eat; that's food. And, don't worry about what you're going to wear; that's fashion. And, don't worry about these things." Do you know what most of the folks in this city and in the city where this message is going out—do you know what they're worrying about? Let me give it to you; they all start with "F": food, friends, fame, fortune, fashion, fitness. Now, that's what people worry about. Jesus said, *"After all these things do the Gentiles seek"* (Matthew 6:32). And, we say, "Gentiles—He meant 'unsaved people.'" Now, He's not saying these things are not important. He didn't say any of those were not important. But, He said what? *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...all these things [will] be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). These things don't even take on significance until you have your deepest needs met.

You see, what is He talking about when He's talking about green grass and still waters? Do you think He's just talking about having your bank account full? Oh, no. Listen, as I told you before, Psalm 22, Psalm 23, and Psalm 24 are a trinity of psalms. Now, go back to Psalm 22 and look in verse 26: *"The meek shall eat and be satisfied"*—what shall they eat? Well, look in the rest of that verse—*"they shall praise the LORD that seek him"* (Psalm 22:26). Do you see that? That's the food. *"They shall praise the LORD that seek him"* (Psalm 22:26). Look, if you will, in verse 29—Psalm 22, verse 29: *"All they that be fat upon the earth shall eat and worship"* (Psalm 22:29). Do you see that? *"All...that be fat"* (Psalm 22:29). God wants healthy sheep. What does the green grass talk about? It's the green pasture of His Word. What do the still waters speak of?

The still waters of His Spirit. You're to find, my friend, your satisfaction in Him; and if you don't find your satisfaction in Him, you're going to be stressed.

And, I'll tell you why you're going to be stressed: because the deepest needs of your heart will never be met. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 4, verse 4? "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). That, the Bible, is to you what bread is to the natural man. And then, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, verse 6: "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6)—hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Do you know what the word *blessed* means? Let me tell you what the word *blessed* means: it's a Greek word, *makarios*, and it literally means, "happy," or "satisfied"—"content, to be congratulated, joyful." You can take many words and roll them all into one and you have the idea of this word, *blessed*.

Now, next, notice what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, verse 6: "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness*" (Matthew 5:6). How many people do you know today that are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the green pastures of His Word, the still waters of His Spirit? How many people do you know that have a hunger for the Word and a thirst for the Spirit? How many? Well, not many. Now, let me ask you another question: How many happy people do you know? Not many.

Now listen, what He said is this: He did not say, "Blessed are those who seek after blessedness. Happy are those who seek after happiness." He said, "Happy are those who seek after righteousness" (Matthew 5:6). Let me tell you something: the most unhappy people in the world are the people who are trying to be happy. Did you know that? Proof-positive. The next time you go on vacation and go to a resort—if you go somewhere; if you go to Gatlinburg, or Miami Beach, or somewhere, or Hawaii, or wherever you go—if you go to a resort, look on the faces of those people walking the streets. Generally, the most miserable faces you'll ever see are in resort places. The happiest faces are people who are working in a service station somewhere right at home—working in an office and just doing something. But, people who seek to be happy, generally, are not.

It is a strange thing: happiness is something you never find by looking for it; happiness is something you stumble over on your way to serve Jesus. It is just when you're serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Happiness is the by-product of righteousness. Do you know what unhappiness comes from? Unhappiness comes from self-centeredness and sin, and God has engineered it that way. God so loves you that God has engineered that you would not be happy without Jesus. That's the reason God said to Adam and Eve, when they left the Garden of Eden, "*Cursed is the ground for [your] sake*" (Genesis 3:17)—not *for your judgment*, but *for your sake*. "I've put a curse on the

ground. Thorns and thistles will it bring forth to you.” Why? When you pick a rose, you say, “Ouch.” When you walk you say, “Ooh.” Why? God wants your path to be thorny. God wants your roses to be thorny. Why? The worst thing that could ever happen to sinful man would be to have a diseased heart and live in paradise. He’d never know anything was wrong. So, God gives us thorns, and God gives us thistles, and God gives us problems, and God gives us heartaches to say, “Hey, there’s something wrong in this world, down here.” What is wrong is sin, and what is the answer? Righteousness. Now, what most people are trying to do is get rid of the thorns and the thistles but not deal with the problem that caused them.

Suppose you go to the doctor, and you’ve got a terrible headache, and you’ve got a fever, and you’ve got a pain, and you’ve got swelling. Evidently, there’s an infection on the inside. But, all the doctor does is give you strong medicine to kill the pain and reduce the fever, but he never deals with the infection. Then, he’s not a good doctor. I want him to kill the pain, if he can, but only to help to get at the infection—the problem. Now folks, people who are trying to be happy are only treating the symptoms. If you’ll seek after righteousness, you’ll be dealing with the infection.

Seek righteousness, and then you’ll be happy—I mean, then you’ll deal with stress. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2)—that’s His Word. “He makes me to drink of the still waters” (Psalm 23:2)—that’s His Spirit. What I’m trying to say—listen—what you need is to have the deepest need of your heart and your life met. It is to worship God. It is to drink of the Spirit. It is to feed on the Word of God. That’s sufficiency. I mean, the deepest need of your heart will be met only in Jesus.

C. Serenity

All right. “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). What did I say? Look in our Good Shepherd: (A) We have in Him security; (B) we have in Him sufficiency; and (C) we then have in Him serenity—serenity. “*He maketh me to lie down*”—“*he maketh me to lie down*” (Psalm 23:2). Sheep will not lie down until they’re content. Have you ever seen so many people hurrying? When I go to the airport, I wonder, “Where are these people going?” I mean, they’re off—*sshhh sshhh sshhh*. On a highway, all these people going this way, and all those people coming this way—why don’t they just stay over there and these people stay over here? Everybody is going, moving.

I was reading in the newspaper a while back about an airplane—a fighter plane. And, this is not a joke; it literally happened. This plane fired its cannon and was moving so fast it overtook the bullet and shot itself down—literally. I mean, I had to reread that. I thought that was just putting on, you know. But no—the plane was moving faster than the shell. And, it literally overtook its own bullet and shot itself down. And, a lot of folks, I

know, are doing the same thing. I mean, they're shooting themselves down. They do not take time to slow down to be still and know that God is God—to have that serenity, that quietness. It's not a sin to be quiet; it's a sin not to be quiet.

Let me give you some scripture. Listen to what God says here. Isaiah 30, verse 15: *"in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength"* (Isaiah 30:15). Listen to this—Psalm 46 and verse 10: *"Be still"—"be still"—"and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10). Do you know what the sheep is doing when it lies down? It's chewing the cud. A sheep has a second stomach. It puts that grass—that sweet grass, and that clover, and that alfalfa—it puts that down there in that second stomach. It's loading up—just loading up. Then, the shepherd says, "Now, lie down and digest what you've got." And so, the sheep brings it back up and begins to chew on it and taste it. That is when the sheep is growing. That's the most productive time for the sheep—that quiet time, that serenity.

Do you know what that is? If that green grass is the Word of God, what is the sheep doing when it's chewing the cud? Meditating—meditating. *"In his law doth he meditate day and night"* (Psalm 1:2). There are so many Scriptures on meditation. Just jot a few of them down. Psalm 1, verses 1 and 2 (Psalm 1:1–2). I talked about that. Psalm 19:14: *"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."* Psalm 104 and verse 34: *"My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD"* (Psalm 104:34). Psalm 119, verse 15: *"I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto they ways"* (Psalm 119:15).

Do you know what's wrong with most of us? We don't lie down in the green grass and meditate. Even those of us who study the Word of God—how much time to really, really digest and assimilate what God has given us? I mean, most of us think we've done God a wild favor if we get to church most on Sunday, right? And, if we can halfway understand what the pastor is saying, fine. When you get home, do you really meditate on what you've heard? When you study God's Word in the morning, do you really have a quiet time? Do you keep a spiritual journal? Do you write down the thoughts that God gives you? Did you know that many of the things that I preach to you are things that God gives me after I've read the Word of God and sit back and think about it? You say, "How do people know what's in the Word of God? Where do you get that?" Well, one way to get it is to sit back and to chew the cud—I mean, sit there and meditate. And, if you expect God to give you something, then you ought to have something to write it down with. You ought to keep a spiritual journal. *"In his law doth he meditate day and night"* (Psalm 1:2). You see, some of us are just too busy. If you don't have time to do this, you're too busy; you're going to miss life. And, in this same chapter—John chapter 10—is the Good Shepherd chapter. Jesus said, *"I [have] come that [you] might have life, and...have it...abundantly"* (John 10:10). You're going to miss life, looking for it.

Sometimes I hear people tell young people this: "make all the money you can, just

so long as you make it honestly.” That’s not good advice—that’s not good advice—because if you make all the money you can, you’re going to be making money when you ought to be doing something else. Hmm? You’re going to be making money when you ought to be being quiet alone with God. I’m not against making money; I’m not against business. But, I’m trying to tell you, folks, you need to stop and prioritize your life and find out that God... You know what I think God does with some of us? He makes us to lie down—He makes us to lie down. I mean, we won’t do it unless He makes us.

David said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray”* (Psalm 119:67). He said in another place, *“It has been good for me that I have been afflicted”* (Psalm 119:71). *“He maketh me to lie down”* (Psalm 23:2). Well, why don’t you just do it yourself? Why don’t you just say, “Never mind, Lord, You don’t have to do it that way? I’d just rather slow down. I want to get quiet. I want to be still. I want to know that Thou art God.”

How do you deal with stress? Remember, a distressed sheep is a sheep that’s not producing wool, not producing fat, not producing lambs—it’s not reproducing. *“He maketh me to lie down”* (Psalm 23:2). Why does the shepherd do that? Why? Because he loves the sheep and he wants healthy sheep. The cure for stress? Find in Jesus Christ your security. He’s the good Shepherd. Find in Him sufficiency—the green pastures. Find in Him serenity. *“He maketh”—“He maketh”—“me to lie down”* (Psalm 23:2).

Conclusion

Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed, please. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, can you say, as David said, *“The LORD is my Shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1)? Not a shepherd—we all know that. Can you say, “He is *my* Shepherd”? If not, may I help you, today, to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? You don’t have to be down here at the front to be saved. You can be saved in an automobile. You can be saved anywhere. You can be saved right where you are. So, I want everyone to get quiet, and I want those of you who are saved to begin to pray right now for those who may not be saved. If you’re not saved—if you’re not certain that you’re saved—may I help you right now, this moment? Would you begin to pray a prayer like this? Just out of your heart—just pray silently, but fervently:

“Dear God, I need You and want You. I want to know You personally. I want my sin forgiven. I want You to live in my heart. I want strength for living. I want to know that I’m going to Heaven when I die. I want my life to live for Your glory—I really do. Lord Jesus, You’re the Good Shepherd. You died for this lost sheep. You died for me. You paid for my sin. Thank You for paying for my sin. Thank You that You love me so much. Now, Jesus, come into my heart”—would you pray that?—“Save me, Jesus. Come into my

heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus.”

Did you ask Him? Then, by faith, according to the promise of His Word, would you thank Him for saving you? The Bible says, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*” (Romans 10:13). Would you just pray this way? “Thank You, Lord Jesus, for saving me. I receive it by faith, right now. You’re now my Shepherd. You’re now my Savior, my God, and my friend forever. And now, Lord Jesus, I will live for You the rest of my life. And, help me never, ever to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

How to Get Right with God and Stay Right with God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 4, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:3

“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

PSALMS 23:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Ministry of the Shepherd
 - A. The Kind of Sheep that Need to be Restored
 1. The Stubborn Sheep
 2. The Straying Sheep
 3. The Sick Sheep
 - B. How the Shepherd Restores the Sheep
 1. The Rod
 - a. You Can Resent or Despise It
 - i. Chastening Reveals Your Son-Ship
 - ii. Chastening Renews Your Worship
 - iii. Chastening Restores Our Fellowship
 - b. You Can Faint Under It
 - c. You Can Be Exercised By It
 2. The Staff
 3. The Bottle of Oil
 - II. The Mastery of the Shepherd
 - A. You've Got to be Obsessed with the Shepherd
 - B. You Have to Observe the Shepherd
 - C. You Have to Obey the Shepherd
 - III. The Majesty of the Shepherd
- Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me, please, to Psalm 23. And, we're continuing this series of Bible studies in Psalm 23. We've already had a wonderful time studying Psalm 23; and today, we're going to be looking primarily at verse 3: *“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake”*

(Psalm 23:3). Just get Psalm 23, and keep it open there in your lap. If you didn't bring a Bible with you, look there in the pew rack before you; most likely, there will be one. And, open it up to Psalm 23. That ought to be just about in the middle of your Bible.

Now, while you look it up, look up here, and I want to ask you a question: What do the following men have in common: Jacob, David, Samson, Simon Peter, John Mark, and Adrian Rogers? Well, I'll tell you what they all have in common: they're all men of God who love God, who have gotten out of fellowship with God, and who've been brought back into fellowship with God. And, you could add your name to that list, too. It is the nature of a sheep to wander and to stray; it is the nature of a sheep sometimes to get away from the Shepherd.

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love (Robert Robinson).*

But, it is the nature of the shepherd to restore his sheep. No wonder David exalted—that David who got so far away from God. No wonder he gloried to write Psalm 23: “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... He restoreth my soul*” (Psalm 23:1–3). I want to talk to you today about how to get right with God and how to stay right with God—how to get right with God, if you're not right with God; how to get right with God; and if you are right with God and when you do get right with God, how to stay right with God.

Now folks, if we're not right, we need to get right; and if we are right, we need to stay right. And, that's what David is talking about in Psalm 23 and verse 3: “*He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*” (Psalm 23:3). Now, many of us become what the Bible calls “backsliders.” Now, a backslider is not lost; a backslider is a saved person who is out of fellowship with God—a somebody who's already been saved. You have to go somewhere before you can slide back. But, he's not lost. The Bible says God speaks of Himself as being married to the backslider; there is a bond there that cannot be broken. (Jeremiah 3:14) But, while that relationship with God cannot be broken, that fellowship with God can be broken, and the joy can be lost. And, therefore, David prayed in Psalm 51: “*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation*” (Psalm 51:12). He didn't say, “Lord, restore Thy salvation.” He never lost his salvation. He lost the joy of his salvation, and he wanted to be restored. And, God did restore him, and David could say, “*He restoreth my soul*” (Psalm 23:3).

Now, I want to tell you how the Lord restores us. I want to give you three wonderful truths. I've thought about these things; I have studied about them, and I have wrung them through my own personal experience. And, I can tell you that the three truths that I want to tell you today—that I want to give you today—from Psalm 23, verse 3 (Psalm 23:3)—are 3 tremendous truths that will keep you, that will get you right, and keep you right.

I. The Ministry of the Shepherd

All right. The very first one I'm going to mention is what I'm going to call "the ministry of the Shepherd"—"the ministry of the Shepherd." Now, David thought of himself as a sheep, and he thought of the Lord as his Good Shepherd. You know, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Now, let me mention three things the Lord Jesus does when His sheep stray.

A. The Kind of Sheep that Need to be Restored

And, incidentally, there are three kinds of sheep that need to be restored.

1. The Stubborn Sheep

First of all, there's what we call "the stubborn sheep." You know any stubborn sheep? You might go home and look in the mirror, and you may see one—stubborn sheep. Now, what are stubborn sheep? Stubborn sheep are sheep that just want their own way. Now, we think of sheep as being gentle, and docile, and easily led. Not necessarily so—sometimes sheep can be very stubborn; sheep can be mulish. They want to go their own way. Isn't that what the Bible says in Isaiah? "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way*" (Isaiah 53:6). We want our way; we get very stubborn. And, sometimes, stubborn sheep need to be restored.

2. The Straying Sheep

And, another kind of sheep that needs to be restored—not only stubborn sheep, but straying sheep. Now, these are sheep that don't just willfully go away. They just weakly go away; they just carelessly go away. And, many times, they fall into pits, and they fall into crevices. And, they get entangled in the thorns, and they get away from the Shepherd. They get in precarious places. And, they need to be restored, and they need to be brought back to the fold.

3. The Sick Sheep

Then, there's a third kind of sheep that needs to be restored, and that's not the stubborn sheep and not the straying sheep, but the sick sheep. Sheep can get sick. There are many enemies out there, and many diseases, and many things that might poison, or ensnare, or wound the sheep. And, sick sheep need to be restored.

B. How the Shepherd Restores the Sheep

Now, it is the ministry of the Shepherd that restores these kinds of sheep. And, I want you to see how He does it. For example, how does the Lord—how does the Good Shepherd—restore stubborn sheep? If you're a stubborn sheep, how will He restore you? Well, He has three instruments, and I want to mention these three. First of all, He has a rod; then, He has a staff; and then, He has a bottle of oil. And, He uses them to restore the sheep.

1. The Rod

Now, He restores the stubborn sheep with the rod. Now, what was the shepherd's rod? The shepherd would go out, and he would find a little sapling; and he would dig that sapling up by the root. And, there would be the roots all sticking from a knob. And, the shepherd would cut the sapling off about a length; and then, he would take his sharp knife and begin to cut away the roots from that knob. Finally, he would have a knob left on the end of that staff a little bigger than his fist, and he would work it until it was smooth and just right. He would smooth that staff down; and then, he would take that knob on the end, and he would begin to drive nails in it, or bits of metal, until it was heavy and weighted. And, it became a very powerful club, a weapon in his hand. He would be out there on the hillsides for many, many weeks with nothing to do except watch the sheep and practice throwing that rod. He would throw it and throw it. It became a deadly missile. He also knew how to wield it, how to use it as a club. And, it was used to protect himself from the robbers. It was used to protect the sheep from the lions, and the wolves, and the wild dogs, and the scavengers that would be there on the hillside.

But, sometimes he had to use the rod on the sheep himself, and the rod itself would become a form of correction to the sheep. Sometimes, if there would be a sheep—a very stubborn sheep—the shepherd would do something very drastic, very severe. He would take that rod, and he would break one of the legs of that sheep—just break the leg of the sheep. And, after he had done that, he would immediately bind it, put it in a splint. He would wrap up the leg of that sheep and try to heal the sheep and get it back, and he would carry the sheep, often, on his shoulders until the leg was mended. He would carry that sheep with the broken leg that he's wounded around on his shoulders, and nurture it, and pour in the oil into the wound. And then, finally, when that leg was healed again, he would restore the sheep to its feet. And, an interesting thing—an interesting thing—that sheep that had been broken and healed would stay very close to the shepherd. In the materials that I've studied, I found out that kind of a sheep would just stay right there by the shepherd's leg and just keep nuzzling the shepherd. Everywhere the shepherd went, that sheep would just want to be very close. He would be the file leader who would lead the other sheep—the one who had been broken and the one who had been restored.

I thought to myself when I came to church earlier this morning—I was sitting in my study—I said, "Somewhere, I know there's a scripture that deals with that." And, I got to thinking about it, and I found it this morning in my study. Hosea chapter 6 and verse 1—look at; just listen to it: "*Come, and let us return unto the LORD*"—now, he's speaking here of those who've been away from God—"*Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up*" (Hosea

6:1). The same God that breaks us is the same God that binds us, in order that we might return to Him. I got to thinking that's exactly what David, who wrote this, meant when he said, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray"* (Psalm 119:67). And then, he said, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted"* (Psalm 119:71).

Then, I was thinking of that scripture over there in Hebrews, where old Jacob the patriarch, who was a shepherd himself, got away from God. You remember how Jacob got away from God? He had met God and had a wonderful experience with God; and then, he got away from God. And, the Bible says that he wrestled with the Lord (Genesis 32:25). And, you know what the Lord did? The Bible says, "The Lord put Jacob's thigh out of joint" (Genesis 32:35). You remember that? He was crippled. The Lord Himself wounded this man of God, and He broke this man of God. And, all of the rest of his life Jacob would walk leaning on a staff. And, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 11, when Jacob came to the end of his life, the Bible says, *"By faith Jacob...worshipped"* (Hebrews 11:21). I think it's about verse 21—Hebrews 11 and verse 21: "when he was dying, Jacob worshipped, leaning on his staff" (Hebrews 11:21). Why did the Bible put that in there? To teach us a lesson. Dear friend, sometimes we have to learn to lean. And, all of his life he was crippled, that he might be broken, that he might be blessed.

Now, what God does sometimes, dear friend, is to chastise the sheep—not because He doesn't love the sheep, but because He does love the sheep. Incidentally, let's turn to the New Testament passage on that. Turn to Hebrews chapter 12 for a moment, and look at this—Hebrews chapter 12, verse 5: *"And have ye forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"*—a scourge was a rod—*"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all"*—that is, "all true sons"—*"are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be [made] partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby"* (Hebrews 12:5–11).

Now, it certainly wasn't joyful when a sheep got its leg broken, yet it brought peace and fruitfulness to that shepherd. And, what was the fruit? Look: *"no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of"*—what? Of what?—*"righteousness"* (Hebrews 12:11). *"He restoreth*

my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:3).

Now, when this kind of chastisement comes to you—if you've been a stubborn sheep, and this kind of chastisement comes to you—there are three things you can do. Hebrews tells us about them.

a. You Can Resent or Despise It

For one, you can resent it. Look, if you will, in verse 5: *"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord"* (Hebrews 12:5). You may just despise it; you may resent it. Now, it'd be very foolish for you to despise it; it'd be very foolish for you to resent the chastening of the Lord. I'll tell you why—for three reasons:

i. Chastening Reveals Your Son-Ship

Number one: That kind of chastening reveals that you are a Son of God; it reveals your son-ship. Look in verse 6: the Bible says here, *"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Hebrews 12:6). It's not that God doesn't love you. It wasn't that the shepherd didn't love that sheep when he applied the rod. It was that he did love the sheep. This is a very severe case. And, the word that is used here in Hebrews of *scourging*—it's not talking about a spanking; it's something very, very severe. Sometimes, it takes that. And, dear friend, it only reveals that you are a child of God—that He loves you. You say, "Well, I dabble in sin. I run with the world. I go my own way, and God doesn't chastise me." Well, down in verse 8, he says, "If you were My child, I would have chastised you. You're not even My child; you're illegitimate. You're claiming to be a Christian, and you're not a Christian. If you're without chastisement, then you're illegitimate. You're not truly Mine," God says. "If you were Mine, I would chastise you" (Hebrews 12:8). *"For whom the Lord loves he [chastens]"* (Hebrews 12:6). It reveals your son-ship.

ii. Chastening Renews Your Worship

I'll tell you something else it does, dear friend: it renews your worship. Look, if you will, in verse 9: *"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence"* (Hebrews 12:9). Did you know that grown men love to talk about how their daddies whipped them? Did you ever notice that? "My old man, boy, he used to lay it on me." They kind of swell up with pride about that. Isn't that something? We give them reverence because we know that they had a standard and we know that they loved them. I pity children who live in homes where the parents don't love them enough to correct them; I pity children like them. Now, what does it do? It reveals our son-ship; it renews our worship.

Now, we gave our earthly fathers reverence. *"Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure"*—it doesn't mean they got fun out of it; it means, "by their own decision"—*"but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness"*

(Hebrews 12:9–10). Now, underscore that. Listen to me, dear friend—God is not in business primarily to make you healthy or happy, but to make you holy, And, God didn't save you to take you to Heaven. That's just a fringe benefit. God saved you to make you holy like Him. And so, what does it do? What does this chastening do when He restores the sheep? It reveals our son-ship; it renews our worship.

iii. Chastening Restores Our Fellowship

And, I'll tell what else it does, dear friend: it restores our fellowship. Look, if you will, in verse 11: *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous"* (Hebrews 12:11). Has God ever laid the rod on you? Well, let me ask you a question: When you were a child, and your dad had to punish you and spank you, did you say, "Oh, this is so wonderful! I'm so glad this is happening to me. My dad's licking the daylights out of me and raising blisters *you know where*, but I'm just so happy. Praise the Lord! Dad, you're a wonderful dad. Thank you, dad. You're so wise and kind"? No, we didn't do that—no. *"No chastening for the present time seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: [but] afterward"—"afterward"—"it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them [that] are exercised thereby"* (Hebrews 12:11). *"Before I was afflicted"*—David said—*"I went astray"* (Psalm 119:67). Old Jacob worshipped leaning on his staff. And, that sheep that had that broken leg never wanted to stray away from the shepherd again, because he had broken, but he had healed—and he had wounded and torn, but he had bound up that wound. Thank God that the Shepherd knows exactly what He is doing.

b. You Can Faint Under It

Now, dear friend, you can—when it comes—that's the first thing you can do: you can despise it. I'll tell you what else you might do when it comes: you can faint under it. Look again in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 5: and the Bible says, *"Have [ye] forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him"* (Hebrews 12:5). Don't despise it, and don't faint under it. Have you ever seen people faint when chastisement comes? I have. They're stubborn and mulish. They get away from God. God brings chastisement, and they just drop out. They just throw up their hands. They just quit. They become spiritual dropouts. That's a terrible thing. God's not doing that to draw you away from Him but to draw you back to Him.

c. You Can Be Exercised By It

Now don't—don't—despise it, and don't faint under it, but be exercised by it. Notice verse 11: the Bible says we *"are exercised thereby"* (Hebrews 12:11). That means that God has a purpose. Now, how does the shepherd—how does the shepherd—deal with a stubborn sheep? He deals with the stubborn sheep with the rod of chastisement—with

the rod of chastisement.

2. The Staff

Now, what about the straying sheep? How does the shepherd deal with the straying sheep? Well, not only did the shepherd have a rod—verse 4 (Hebrews 12:4) speaks of the shepherd's rod—but verse 4 also speaks of the shepherd's staff. Now, the shepherd would get another long sapling, and he would cut this one off above the root. And, it would be *about that size* in a stock—just fit in his hand real good like the handle of a baseball bat—but it would be long and willowy. And, he would take that staff, that piece of sapling, and he would soak it in water while it was green and pliable. Sometimes he would put it in boiling water 'til he could bend it, and he would put a bent in the end of it, and tie it, and let it dry and season. And, at the end, he had it shaped just right. There was a crook—we call it “the shepherd's crook.” That's what you often see about the shepherd. He's holding a crook like that called “the shepherd's crook.” It was just big enough to go around the chest of a little lamb and just big enough to go around the neck of a sheep. And, with that staff he would guide the sheep.

It became an instrument in his hand, and he would guide the sheep and retrieve the sheep. He knew how to use this. He would walk along and just touch the sheep with it. He'd put it around the neck of a sheep and pull the sheep in that's straying. When the sheep is walking along a narrow path that might fall off, he would take that staff, and he would lay it on the sheep's shoulder and just guide the sheep when the sheep would get down in the briars. Have you ever been in the briars? I have. He would put that staff in there and pull that sheep out of the briars. When the sheep would get down in the mud, he would put that staff down there and lift that sheep—that lamb—out of the mud. Do you remember what David said in Psalm 40? “He hath lifted me up from the miry clay. He hath my feet upon a rock and established my goings and leads me in the paths of righteousness” (Psalm 40:2). He's talking about the same thing. He would take that staff, and he would guide, and guard, and lift, and retrieve that sheep to him.

Sometimes a mother sheep—an ewe—would neglect her lamb. Sometimes she would get so concerned with the things that she wanted to do. Sometimes she wanted to feed here; sometimes she wanted to nibble here. Sometimes she wanted to browse here, and she would forget her lamb. Now, the shepherd sees that, and he would take his shepherd's crook; and he would draw the lamb and draw the mother sheep back together, because the shepherd knew that if that mother neglected that lamb too long a time, after a while she would forget about it altogether. And, that little lamb would miss what it needed most next to the shepherd's tender care—the care of that old ewe sheep. And, I thought, “O my God, how the Shepherd needs to do that today—to draw these mamas and these babies backs together!” And, this day, when the devil is doing all he can do to break up homes, the Shepherd there is guiding with this staff. And,

when we fall, when we're weak, oh, we get away from God and we get in sin—we get in the briars, we get in the mud, we get into difficulty—thank God He has that staff—that love, that grace—that draws us back to Him!

3. The Bottle of Oil

Then, there's a third thing: not only were there those stubborn sheep, not only were there those straying sheep, but there were the sick sheep. You see, each night the shepherd would bring the sheep into the sheepfold. Now, remember I told you last week that the shepherd said, "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John 10:7)? I mean, inside that enclosure the sheep were safe, but at the door was the shepherd himself, who would position his body across that opening. And, no one would come in or out without his permission. He said, "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John 10:7)—"I'm the One who lets them in. I'm the One who lets them out. No one can get in except by My permission."

And, as they would come in each night, here's what the shepherd would do: each night, he would count them, and he would call them by name. And, not only would he call them by name, but he would caress them. He would fondle them. He would put his hands all over the sheep and rub his fingers down into the wool, and he would be looking for a scar—he'd be looking for a bruise, he'd be looking for a scab, he'd be looking for a wounded place, he'd be looking for a laceration. And, when the shepherd would find that kind of a place, he had not only a rod and not only a staff, but he had a bottle of oil. And, he would see a bruise on that sheep's head or a cut place—a place there on the nostril—and he would pour on the healing oil. He would anoint the head of that sheep with oil. And, that oil was there to soothe, and to medicate, and to heal, and to lubricate—to give comfort to a suffering sheep.

That oil would be mixed also with sulfur and tar. And, it was used to repel insects. Sheep have a pest that bothers them called nose-flies that get up into wounds and places in the nose, and this oil would be smeared there on the sheep's nose to give comfort and protection from those pests. Thank God for the oil of the Holy Spirit that protects us from the devil's flies! Thank God for that comfort when we've been bruised and hurt, and when we're wounded and when we're limping, that the Shepherd—He knows, He cares, He feels, He calls those sheep by name. He knows them one by one, and He restores them, and heals them, and binds them, and brings them back to Himself.

I think David had all of those things in mind when he said, "*He restoreth my soul*" (Psalm 23:3). I think David had been stubborn and been broken. I think David had strayed and been retrieved. I think David had been hurt and been wounded and had been healed by the Lord. Thank God for the ministry of chastisement. Thank God for the ministry of correction. Thank God for the ministry of comfort. And, I thought about it in my own life, and I know that I know I'm here today because the Good Shepherd has

kept me with His rod, with His staff, and with His bottle of oil.

Can't you say the same thing? Can't you say, "Amen"? Can't you remember the times when He put on the rod? I can. Can't you remember the times when He took that staff, and lifted you, and forgave you? Hallelujah for that! And, can't you think of those times when the tender Shepherd poured in the oil, and caressed you, and told you He loved you, and healed that broken heart? Thank God for such a wonderful Shepherd! "*He [restores] my soul*" (Psalm 23:3). And, the thing that got David right is what I want to call, first of all, "the ministry of the Shepherd"—"the ministry of the Shepherd."

II. The Mastery of the Shepherd

But, there was something else—not only the ministry of the Shepherd, but also the mastery of the Shepherd. Now, listen—not only does He restore our soul (He leads us in the paths of righteousness); He restored us, that He might master us, that He might guide us. And, the problem with many of us is this—that all we're interested in is getting restored. Well, my dear friend, if you don't go from restoration to righteousness, you're going to be right back in the same old problem. You see, so many of us just simply want to get back right, but we don't get on the track of following God; and that's the reason that we get back where we were. And, a restored ought to follow closer than ever. "He that's been forgiven much ought to love much" (Luke 7:47). And, we ought to be like that sheep with the broken leg that just nuzzles the Shepherd and stays close to the Shepherd, that He might master us, that He might lead us, that He might guide us, that we'll never go astray again. When are we going to learn? How many times are we going to fall and slip before we learn to stay close to the Shepherd? Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*" (John 10:27).

Now, let me tell you, in order to follow the Shepherd, three things are necessary:

A. You've Got to be Obsessed with the Shepherd

Number one: You've got to be obsessed with the Shepherd; you've got to love the Shepherd.

B. You Have to Observe the Shepherd

Number two: You have to observe the Shepherd. Sheep don't have good eyesight. You have to stay close to the Shepherd.

C. You Have to Obey the Shepherd

And, number three: You have to obey the Shepherd. "*My sheep hear my voice*"—"*[they] hear my voice*" (John 10:27). Now, you can't obey any body whose voice you don't hear. And, how are you going to hear your Shepherd's voice? How are you going to see your Shepherd?

You're going to have to have that quiet time in the green pastures, chewing upon His

Word, meditating upon the Word of God. That's the way the Shepherd, my dear friend, He's going to lead you, and He's going to guide you. You are going to hear His voice in the Word. Jesus said, *"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63). And, He said, *"[I've] come that [ye] might have life...and have it...abundantly"* (John 10:10). He will lead you in the paths of righteousness. That's the mastery of the Shepherd.

You know what's wrong with so many of us? We're just always trying to get out of trouble rather than to get into righteousness. I mean, it's all negative.

I think I told you many years ago about a football player friend that I had whose name was Mike Kolen. Mike played football for Auburn and went on to play for the Miami Dolphins as a linebacker. He said, when he graduated from Auburn, the coach down there said, "Mike, would you help me to do some recruiting?" He said, "Sure, Coach. Say, what kind of player are you looking for?" He said, "Mike, you know," he said, "when you're playing football, there's a guy—you knock him down, and he just stays down." Mike said, "We don't want him, do we, Coach?" He said, "No, we sure don't." But, he said, "Mike, there's a guy—you knock him down, and he gets up; and then when you knock him down, he stays down." Mike said, "We don't want him either, do we, Coach?" He said, "No, I don't." But, he said, "Mike, there's a guy—you knock him down, and he gets up; and you knock him down, and he gets up; and you knock him down, and he gets up; and you knock him down, and he gets up; and you knock him down, and he gets up." Mike said, "That's the guy we want, isn't it, Coach?" He said, "No, we don't want him either. I want you to find that guy that's knocking everybody down. That's the guy I want."

Now, I am grateful. I am grateful that He restores us. I'm grateful that when we're down, He gets us up—when we're down, He gets us up; when we're down, He gets us up. But, wouldn't you like to get up and stay up? I mean, wouldn't you like to get off the defensive and get on the offensive? Wouldn't you like to do a little knocking? I mean, wouldn't you like to be a force for God rather than just simply being a casualty always being restored? You see, the problem with so many of us is that we have a restoration mentality. *"He [restores] my soul"*—but, my dear friend, after the ministry of the shepherd, there needs to be the mastery of the shepherd—*"he [leads] me in the paths of righteousness"* (Psalm 23:3). Why don't you, today, determine that you are going to get right with God and stay right with God—that you're going to hear the voice of your Shepherd, you're going to get into the Word of God and not find yourself back in the briars, or down in the pit, or down in the mud, or down in the crevice again?

III. The Majesty of the Shepherd

Now, there's a third thing that will keep you. And, I can guarantee you these things have kept me. Not only is there what I call "the ministry of the Shepherd," and not only is

there what I call “the mastery of the Shepherd,” but there’s also the majesty of the Shepherd—the majesty of the Shepherd. Listen to it: *“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”* (Psalm 23:3)—His name, His name.

What is the name of the Shepherd? We already know. It’s in the first verse. What is the name of the Shepherd? *“[Jehovah] is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1). The *King James* says, *“The LORD”* (Psalm 23:1), but that’s in all caps and it means, “Jehovah,” or, “Yahweh,” the most holy name for God in all of the Bible. *“The LORD [Jehovah] is my shepherd... he [leads] me...for his name’s sake”* (Psalm 23:1–3).

You see, my dear friend, God’s name—God’s honor—is at stake by the way you live and the way I live. Did you know that the name Jehovah is judged by the people in this room? I mean, people get their idea of what kind of a shepherd there is because of what kind of sheep there are. The shepherd’s reputation is based on the activity, and the welfare, and the obedience of the sheep.

Jesus taught us to pray, *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”* (Matthew 6:9). Solomon said in the Song of Solomon, *“[His] name is [like] ointment poured forth”* (Song of Solomon 1:3). Jehovah—Jehovah—is His name. I’m going to tell you something very interesting: that was the most sacred—most solemn—name for God in all of the Old Testament; and yet, it’s not found one time in the New Testament. Not one time—one time—in the New Testament will you ever find the name *Jehovah*. Do you know why? Because Jesus is our Jehovah. Jesus Himself said, *“I am the good shepherd”* (John 10:11) in John 10. *“I am the good shepherd”* (John 10:11). Do you know what the name *Jesus* means? It means, “Jehovah saves.” That’s exactly what the name *Jesus* means. *“Thou shalt call his name [Jehovah saves]: for he shall save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). That’s what the angel said: *“Thou shalt call his name JESUS”* (Matthew 1:21). And, my dear friend, if I am His sheep and He is my Shepherd, I don’t want to disgrace that name. *“A GOOD name is rather to be chosen than great reaches”* (Proverbs 22:1).

When I would take my little children to school and let them out in the morning, each morning before they would go to school, I would say, “Daddy loves you, and remember this: remember who you are and remember whose you are—remember who you are and remember whose you are.” I believe the Lord would say that to His sheep: “Remember who you are: you are My sheep, the people of My pasture. My name is linked to you. I want to lead you in the paths of righteousness for my name’s sake” (Psalm 95:7; Psalm 23:3). I had rather die than bring disgrace upon my family, my parents, my children, and my wife. A good name is so important. How much more the name of our God! What keeps me straight? But, one thing—the Lord restores me when I stray. Another thing—the Lord leads me day by day. But, another thing—there is, in

my heart, a burning desire to give glory to that name—to give glory to that name. Do you feel that way?

Oh, the name of Jesus! Somebody said, “The name of Jesus is all of the *hallelujahs* in five letters” It is.

*I know a soul that's steeped in sin, that no man's art can cure.
But I know a name, a precious name, that can make that soul all pure.
I know a life that's lost to God, bound down by the things of earth.
But I know a name, a precious name, that can bring that soul new birth*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Jesus—oh, how sweet the name! My friend, that ought to keep you straight—the ministry of the Shepherd, the mastery of the Shepherd, and the majesty of our great Shepherd. “[*Jehovah*] is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1).

Conclusion

Let me give you a verse, and then I'm going to be finished. Put in your margin “2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 19”: “*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*” (2 Timothy 2:19). Isn't that a good verse? “*Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*” (2 Timothy 2:19). “*He [leads] me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake*” (Psalm 23:3). What a Shepherd! Thank God for His ministry, His mastery, and His majesty!

How High Are Your Valleys?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 10, 1980

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:4

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

PSALMS 23:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Dark Possibility: *Though*
- II. The Determined Purpose: *Through*
- III. The Delightful Promise: *Thou*
 - A. His Presence Vanishes Fear
 - B. His Presence Provides Protection
 - C. His Presence Gives Security

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn please to Psalm 23. I know that you are familiar with this wonderful psalm. And do you know that one of the great dangers is that we may be so familiar with the twenty-third Psalm that we miss some of the beauties?

One time a botanist was out on his hands and his knees with a magnifying glass looking down at a little flower in a pasture. And a big, old brawny shepherd came and stood behind. And at first, the botanist was not aware that the shepherd was there. And the shepherd had a smile on his face. To him it was ludicrous. Here was a man on his hands and knees with a magnifying glass looking at one little flower. And when the botanist finally recognized the presence of this shepherd, and he felt a little silly himself at first, but then he said to the shepherd, “Here, you come and take a look.” And the shepherd knelt down and took the magnifying glass himself and looked at that exquisitely beautiful little heather bell, the little flower there, and after he did, the tears popped in his eyes and started to course down his cheeks. And the botanist said, “Why are you crying?” “Oh,” he said, “I knew they were there, but,” he said, “I just think of how many I trampled under my feet without really looking at them.” I wonder if we don’t do that to some of the more familiar passages in the Bible. I wonder if we don’t need somehow to take God’s magnifying glass and look a little more closely.

I had thought when I first started that I would preach on the entire psalm, and then I said, “No, I’m going to narrow it down to one, and we’ll just take the magnifying glass and look at the one verse. But I want us to at least share the whole psalm together to get the one verse in its proper setting.

It begins this way: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Psalm 23:1–6).

You know, mankind has had some magnificent and amazing ideas that have changed the course of history. Copernicus sat in a cathedral one day, and it had a chandelier similar to our chandelier, only it was on a longer pendulum. And he was watching the chandelier, and it seemed to sway ever so slightly. He was like some of you. He wasn’t paying attention to the sermon. He was just watching and thinking, and his mind was off somewhere else. And he got to thinking. He said, “There is some force; there is something causing the pull, the sway; there is some attraction.” And he came up with the idea that this world indeed is not the center of our universe, but that the sun is the center of the solar system and that the earth revolves around the sun. And all the ideas of astronomy and science and so forth were changed by this great idea that Copernicus had.

Again, there was a man, a brilliant man, at the close of the dark ages. He was in a shop watching a scribe transcribe laboriously a manuscript a letter at a time. So exacting and so carefully was he doing it. And this man said, “You know, if I could take little blocks of wood and carve little letters and make them where I could turn them around and move, then these men wouldn’t have to do all of this laborious work. His name was Gutenberg. And he invented the printing press. And that brought in the Renaissance that helped to bring in the Industrial Revolution. And so many things were changed and life will never again be the same because of this great concept of moveable type.

Again, there was another man. He sat in his rocking chair smoking a pipe and thought. With his white whiskers there, he sat and thought and stroked his whiskers. And finally he came up with an idea. His name was Albert Einstein. The idea, the thought, was that of relativity. You know, they say that only twelve people on earth understand the theory of relativity. I’m not so sure of that, because I don’t know the other eleven. It’s just such a concept, a thought. With that theory and the idea of the

theory of relativity we move into the atomic age and we've split the atom. We've come into something that, whether we agree with it or not, or whether you are in favor of it or not, you're going to have to admit that this idea was so great, so lofty, that it literally changed the scope of history—dramatically did.

But I want to tell you, dear friend, I don't believe that any of them ever had a greater idea, or concept, or a revelation, as a shepherd boy who said on a lonely Judean hill, "*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" You talk about a thought that can radically transform your life and radically change this world, it is that thought: "*The LORD is my shepherd.*" I believe that the twenty-third Psalm ought to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Have you ever thought about what a magnificent psalm it is? Think about the scope and the reach of it. It's sweet to a little child. And yet it is perplexing to a scholar. It is quoted at funerals, and it is quoted at weddings. It is quoted in the nursery school, and it is quoted on the battlefield, the twenty-third Psalm.

I want us to look at just one verse in that twenty-third Psalm, the fourth verse that's going to be the key verse for what we have to say this morning. Look at it—verse 4: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" There are three words in that verse that I want you to underscore, and all three of them start with the letter *t*. And I call it three tremendous *t*'s. And incidentally, the title for my message this morning is this: "How High Are Your Valleys?"—"How High Are Your Valleys?"—because we all go through the valleys. I want to tell you, dear friend, you can go through some mighty high valleys if you know the Lord. One man said, "I'm happier now when I am sad than I was glad when I was glad before I found the Lord Jesus Christ." Even our valleys can be lofty valleys.

I want us to think on verse 4 now; let's look at it: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" Underscore the word *though*. "*Yea, though...*" Then underscore the word *through*. Then underscore the word *thou*, and you will have it: *though, through, and thou*, three tremendous words beginning with the letter *t*.

I. The Dark Possibility: *Though*

The first one tells us of a dark possibility: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*" Friend, it is absolutely possible that this afternoon that you may start into that valley, sometimes unexpectedly. The next phone call, the next letter, the next corner we turn, can plunge us into a dark valley.

Now the valley of the shadow of death was a literal valley in Palestine. And David was very familiar with it, for David was a shepherd boy. And there at the Mount of Olives a spring breaks out and causes a little river. It has been flowing through the centuries.

And this little river flows down toward the Dead Sea, down into that valley area, and as it flows it has cut and cut and cut a chasm until that chasm has become in some places 1,500 feet deep, but it is very narrow. In some places, it may be only 15 or 20 feet wide, and it is a very dangerous valley because of its narrowness and because of its deepness. There are very great grotesque shadows coming out of there. And in that valley are all kinds of animals and so forth. Used to be, bears would be there. Lions would be there. Hyenas would be there. Jackals would be there. Sometimes robbers and thieves would lurk there, sometimes scorpions and other things. And the shepherds called it *“the valley of the shadow of death.”*

It was a very common occurrence for the shepherd to have to lead his sheep through this valley, because in the wintertime in Palestine it can get quite cold. I’ve seen it snow. But if you go down to the Jericho valley, it’s like a summer health resort and it’s very warm there in Jericho. And so in the wintertime the sheep would graze there in Jericho. And yet when the spring would come, the green hills would start to blossom with beautiful flowers on those green hills. Grass that you couldn’t even tell was there just turns a beautiful bright mint green. And it’s time there for the shepherds to lead their sheep from the winter grazing grounds up into the mountaintops and up into the hills. And they have to lead them through this dark valley, the valley of the shadow of death. And that’s what David is talking about, literally, but he’s using it symbolically to teach us a wonderful, wonderful lesson, and that is the possibility that any child of God can have a dark valley.

Don’t you think for one little moment, sir, just because you are a Christian that you can’t have any trouble. I want you to jot in your Bible this verse now—Psalm 34, verse 19: *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous...”*—did you hear that? Not of the unsaved, not of the ungodly—*“Many are the afflictions of the righteous:”*—because you are saved does not mean that you’ll not have any dark valleys. I thank God for the other side of that verse though that says—*“but the LORD delivereth him out of them all”* (Psalm 34:19). Hallelujah for that!

Let me give you another verse to jot down there in the margin—1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 10: *“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you”* (1 Peter 5:10). Notice that. It speaks of the grace of God. It speaks of the glory of God. But it also speaks of the grief of God. *“After you have suffered a while”*: not if you have suffered, but just *“after you have suffered.”*

Somebody has said that, “God only had one Son without sin, but He’s not had any Son without sorrow.” Sooner or later, a hush will come to your home. I don’t want to be morbid about it. I’m not trying to be morbid, because, dear friend, my message this morning is not a morbid message. But I would be less than honest if I were to tell you

this morning that if you become a Christian that from there on there's going to be nothing but joy and light and sweetness and roses and that you're going to move through life in an ever ascending scale of health and success and happy family life and prosperity and a serene old age and a glorious exit into heaven. That's the way we all like to live. But I tell you there are plenty of people who love God just as much as you do, and more than many of us, who have gone through some dark valleys. And David was one of them. And there's a *though* there. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*"

But friend, you know as well as I know that you can't have a valley unless you have mountains. And you know that this Psalm 23 is perched between two other psalms. Psalm 22 tells of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 is written as though someone were seated at the foot of the cross. And it describes graphically the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore it is a mountain psalm. It tells us of Mount Calvary, Mount Moriah, where the Lord Jesus died. And then look, if you will, please, in Psalm 24, and that speaks of the coronation of the Lord Jesus Christ when He is going to be lifted up in glory. Listen how it ends: "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah*" (Psalm 24:8–10).

And so you see in Psalm 22 you have the crucifixion of our Lord, Mount Calvary. And then in Psalm 24 you have the coronation of our Lord, Mount Zion. And Psalm 23 is the valley in between. This trilogy of psalms is in a distinct order. You have first of all the Savior's cross, then the Shepherd's crook, and then the Sovereign's crown. All of them are right there together. And Psalm 23 is the valley between the blood-drenched slopes of Mount Calvary and the sunlit peaks of Mount Glory and Mount Zion. And thank God, dear friend, for every valley there must be a mountain. And you need to remember that when you are in the valley, you couldn't be in the valley were it not for these mountains.

And oh, I want you to think on that. I just want you to think on that. I want to tell you something else. The Bible speaks of "*the valley of the shadow of death.*" And for every shadow there must be a light. You can't have a shadow unless you have a light. Christ said, "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8:12; John 9:5). He is the light even through the dark valley. It is Christ. A shadow may frighten you, but a shadow cannot really harm you. A lot of us have been frightened by our own shadow so many times and shadows of others, but thank God, death is but a shadow if you know the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you keep your face toward the light, the shadow will fall behind you. You won't even see it at all.

I would to God that I could plant this in your heart this morning. You will pass through that valley, but you can't have a valley without mountains, and you cannot have

shadows without light. And never forget it; never, never, never forget it. There is a *though*. You are going to pass through that valley. And I know today, I know as surely as I'm standing here, I'm speaking to many of you who have passed through dark valleys, or will indeed pass through them, or may today be in the middle of them.

II. The Determined Purpose: *Through*

But now I want you to notice something else. I want you to notice not only the dark possibility: *though*; but I want you to notice secondly, the determined purpose: *through—through*. “*Yea, though I walk through the valley...*” God doesn't just lead us into the valley and leave us there; He always brings us through. Remember again Psalm 34, verse 19: “*Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.*” Friend, He brings you in only to bring you out. And God is going to bring you through.

Those of us who fly on airplanes I think, perhaps, would change this from the figure of a shepherd to his sheep to a pilot and an airplane and his passengers. You know, have you ever gotten on an airplane when it is turbulent and cloudy and you just wonder if they can ever even take off in that soup? And finally they get clearance, and down the runway that thing goes, and it gathers speed, and it lifts off, and gets up in that cloud and bumpy air. And those clouds are gathering, and it is bouncing this way and that way, and you get thinking about that airplane poison. You know, “One drop and it will kill you.” And you're just riding there.

I had a pastor friend who was sitting on an airplane with a lady, and she was very nervous; she was crying. And it was rough. And he turned to her, he tried to comfort her, and she said, “Do you mean to tell me you're not afraid in all of this?” He said, “Well, lady, before I got on this thing, I committed my life into the hands of my heavenly Father.” And then he said, “I will have to admit that I have reminded Him about it several times since we've been up here.”

I think all of us can identify with that, but you know, that airplane goes on as it gains altitudes, and it's almost like a miracle every time it happens. Bang! It just bursts through those clouds. And there is the most dazzling blue sky and the most golden and warm sunlight. And it dawns on me, that sun has been shining the whole time. It is a lesson that is ever fresh. You know, we come through a day like we had yesterday and the day before. You know, it's cloudy and overcast, and we say, “The sun is not shining today.” That's just a lie, isn't it? We know the sun is shining if you think about it. It's always shining. And God is always there.

Dear friend, one of these days, He'll bring you through, and you'll come out of those clouds. And you can say, “*The LORD is my shepherd,*” or the Lord is my pilot. But I want you to know that we're coming *through*.

David knew what it was. I believe he wrote Psalm 23 when he was an old man, but I believe he learned the lesson when he was a young man. But David had been through the valley of suffering as Saul persecuted him, but he came through. He had been through the valley of slander when others lied on him. But he came through. He'd been through the valley of sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and repentance, and that agony. But thank God, he came through. And he wrote Psalm 51. He'd been through the valley of sorrow and he'd seen his little baby die, and he'd seen his son Absalom that he loved: "Absalom, O Absalom, my son Absalom, would to God that I'd died for thee" (2 Samuel 18:33). But he came through. He came through. He knew what it was to go into dark valleys. But he came through. And so will you. So will you. *"Weeping [endures] for [the] night, but joy cometh in the morning"* (Psalm 30:5).

I want to tell you, *if you love our God, and if you will trust Him, He'll turn every hurt into a hallelujah and He'll turn every Calvary into an Easter. And He'll take every tear and change it into a pearl and make it a diadem for you to wear.* God's plan, my dear friend, is to bring you through. You're going through. You're going through. It is His plan and purpose. *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."*

III. The Delightful Promise: *Thou*

Now the third and final thing I want you to notice. Not only the dark possibility, and not only the determined purpose, but I want you to notice the delightful promise: *"Thou art with me."* David never left his sheep alone. He always went through the valley with them. How much more is that heavenly Shepherd who said, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5).

Now friend, do you think God is close now? Do you think God is close in a worship service? He is. He is. Thank God for that. Do you think God is close in your devotionals? He is. Do you think God is close in the good times? He is. But God will never be closer to you than when you are in a dark valley. He is especially nigh unto those who are in trouble. That's what the Bible teaches. He is especially near.

Do you know how the psalm starts? *"The LORD is my shepherd."* And he is talking about the Lord. But now notice in the dark valley—do you notice how the person changes? *"Thou art with me."* He is not talking *about* the Lord now; he is talking *to* the Lord. You know, right now you could get in this service and we'd be talking about Him; you go in the dark valley, you'll be talking to Him, you know, and it's so different.

When a man talks about his wife, he may call her "the little lady." But when he gets with her, he'd better not call her that. If he talks to her, and with her, and there is that "I-thou" relationship.

Oh, how near the Lord is! How near the Lord is! Here is that promise, that delightful

promise: *“Thou art with me.”*

A. His Presence Vanishes Fear

Let me give you another verse. Jot it down in your margin. Isaiah chapter 43 and verse 2: *“When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee;”*—not if you pass, but when you pass through the water, I will be with you—*“and through the rivers...”*—not into, but—*“through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”* (Isaiah 43:2). And this delightful promise vanishes all fear.

Do you know what David says? David says, *“The LORD is my shepherd,”* and, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”* I will not fear. *“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7). Over and over in the Bible, 365 times, one time for every day in the year, God has said, “Fear thou not,” or its equivalent. *“I will fear no evil.”* His presence vanishes fear. Why should we be afraid if He is there? *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). Ladies and gentlemen, *it is better in a dark valley with Jesus than it is on a sunlit mountain without Him*—better to be in a dark valley with Jesus than on a sunlit mountain without Him. *“Thou art with me.”* Oh, what more could we want than His presence?

B. His Presence Provides Protection

Not only does His presence vanish fear, but it provides protection. You notice it says, *“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”* The rod and the staff were different. The rod was a club about so long. The shepherd would make it from a gnarled root on one end that he would make like a bulbous club, then he would lengthen it on out and smooth it on out until he had a handle grip. He could use that thing as a man-of-war. It was to protect the sheep. And there was plenty to protect the sheep from. Do you remember when David said, “I slew a lion and I slew a bear” (1 Samuel 17:36)? Why did he do that? To protect his flock. And listen. David was a strong, swarthy young man, and he had this rod and he knew what it was to use it as a club; that is, to take care of his sheep.

You say, “Well, my goodness, it is just a sheep. What man would risk his life for a sheep? I mean, after all, he’s a human; that’s just a dumb animal!” A shepherd had a sacred honor to keep his sheep. A sacred honor—it meant something. It may not mean much to you. You say, “Only an animal.” But not to a shepherd boy in David’s time. David risked his life. A lion and a bear. And he took that club and he went into battle to protect that sheep. And then David applied that to himself. He said, “Oh, how much more is God going to take care of me” (1 Samuel 17:37). The mighty rod of God, the power of God—we’re kept by the power of God. Why should I fear? His presence

vanishes fear. His presence protects me from mine enemies.

C. His Presence Gives Security

And then he said, *“Thy rod and thy staff.”* The staff was different. The staff was a long instrument that had a crook at the end. We call it the shepherd’s crook. He would take some sapling and he would smooth it out and take all the bumps out of it. And then he would put the end in boiling water and soak it there, and bend it and soak it, and bend it until he had a crook in the end of it just like he wanted it. It was just big enough to fit around a sheep’s neck if it were a grown sheep, or around the chest of a lamb if it were a small lamb. And with that he would guide the flock. Just a touch. He never used the rod on the flock, just the staff. Then, when the sheep would fall into some crevice, he’d reach down and lift it out. When it would fall in the fire, he would lift him out; when it would be in the quicksand and in the mud. You remember that psalm, Psalms chapter 40? It said, *“He hath lifted me up out of a miry pit”* (Psalm 40:2). He’s talking about the same thing. David is thinking of himself as a sheep, and how the Lord lifts him and keeps him.

You see, dear friend, He keeps His own. Do you know one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible? John 10:27 and 28: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish”* (John 10:27–28). Isn’t that great? His sheep.

You see, His presence vanishes fear. His presence protects us from the enemy. His presence gives security. *“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”* And oh, so you see, there are three tremendous *t*’s. *“Yea, though”*: there is a dark possibility. And yet there is a definite purpose: *“through.”* And there is a delightful promise: *“thou art with me.”*

Conclusion

This past week, I went to Washington D. C. to the National Prayer Breakfast. And there at the National Prayer Breakfast were congressmen and our President. And we had prayer together. And I went over to a friend of mine, Senator Jesse Helms, I think one of the great senators in Washington, from North Carolina. He’s a Southern Baptist. He’s born again. He loves our Lord. And Senator Jesse Helms has a bill that wants to help the freedom to have prayer in public schools, not some state-enforced religion, not that, but to allow people to go back to the principles upon which this government was founded and the ideals that made us the great nation and to allow us to have voluntary prayer in our schools. I am helping him in that thing and glad to be one of the supporters of that thing and helping him. We were talking about this particular thing and then we started sharing about the things of the Lord. Senator Jesse Helms told me a story that so moved my heart I want to share it with you.

It's a story concerning Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Do you know who Alexander Solzhenitsyn is? If you don't know, you ought to know. He is one of the leading thinkers and literary artists of all times. He's alive now in our age. He's a Russian dissident. He was a Russian citizen, but he believed in God and he believed against a godless communist philosophy, and so forth. And because of that, they put this brilliant, scintillating, gifted, articulate man in a dungeon; they put him in a prison camp. And he was telling Senator Jesse Helms about it. And he said, "Senator, you've never known real repression." And he said, "I pray God that you never will." And he said, "I want to tell you what happened to me." And he told that he was put in that prison camp and that he was shut away from all communication from the outside world: no newspapers, no radio, no television, no books, no pencils, no paper, and no conversation; completely shut off, not knowing what on earth was going on in the world; hard, physical, manual labor, day after day after day—that kind of existence.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, "I came to the place where I decided I would take my own life, but then," he said, "I thought of my faith in God. I thought of the teaching of the Bible and," he said, "I knew that I could not do that. But life was intolerable." He said, "I did not know what I was going to do, and then," he said, "this thought came into my mind." He said, "I know what I'll do. I will try to escape, knowing that it is impossible. But I will break and run, and then," he said, "they will shoot me in the back. And I won't have to take my life; they will take it." And of course that was twisted thinking. And later on, he knew that was twisted thinking. But the man was in that sort of a situation where even his normal logic was somewhat perverted.

So he came out on this particular day and made up his mind this was the day. The guards had been very brutal. The prisoners were sitting under a tree, given just a few moments of respite and rest. Sitting under a tree, they were not allowed to murmur one word to another. Alexander Solzhenitsyn made up his mind and he said, "This is the time." And he put his hand on ground, ready to push up, ready to spring, ready to run, and just at that moment a fellow prisoner came and stood before him and looked into his eyes. They couldn't speak a word. And Solzhenitsyn said, "Love and peace were in that man's eyes, and his eyes met mine, and we stood there and he looked into my eyes, knowing he could not say a word. But kindness and compassion and peace flowed from his face. And then he took a stick as though he were just making a mark in the ground. It would mean nothing to the guards, but with that stick he drew a cross." Solzhenitsyn said, "I looked down, and God spoke to my heart, and God said, 'Solzhenitsyn, I am with you in the valley.'" He said, "Little did I know that in three days I would be in Geneva, Switzerland, a free man."

All over the world, people were talking about Solzhenitsyn and what had happened to him, and people were pressuring the Russian government, and people were praying

for him. And finally, because of this pressure, this man was set free: three days, and he was in Switzerland. But there he was, right on the verge of saying, “It’s all over. I can’t take it any longer.”

And I believe today that I am speaking to some people who are saying, “I can’t take it any longer. I’ve had all I can I take. I don’t think that I can go on.” I would to God that He would give me the ability to hold up the cross before you. And I would to God that He would give me the power to tell you that, “Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you should fear no evil,” that He is with you and He is going to bring you through. And it may be sooner than you realize. But He will—He will. “Yea, *though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*”

How to Smile at Death

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 11, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:4

“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”

PSALMS 23:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. Accept Death as a Decided Fact
 - A. Death Is a Stubborn Fact
 - B. Death Is an Uncertain Fact
 - C. Death Is a Personal Fact
- II. Acknowledge Death as a Defeated Foe
 - A. There Can Be No Valley Without Mountains
 - B. There Can Be No Shadow Without Light
 - C. There is No Evil Without Greater Good
- III. See Death as a Delightful Friend
 - A. The Presence of the Shepherd
 - B. The Power of the Shepherd
 - C. The Purpose of the Shepherd

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and find Psalm 23 and verse 4—Psalm 23 and verse 4. Now, I suppose that Psalm 23 is known better than any other psalm in all of the Bible. And, I suppose that verse 4 is quoted perhaps more than any other verse in that psalm: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).

A little lady had walked with Him for many, many years. She was a saint by every measure of the word. At last her body grew frail, and her life was ebbing away. And, she was on what many would call her “deathbed.” And, her loved ones were around her, and they were wringing the hands; and they were crying, and they were weeping. And, she looked up at them. She said, “Now, go ahead and cry if you must. But,” she said, “don’t cry for me.” She said, “I am tickled to death to die.” I like that—“tickled to death to die.”

I want to talk to you about how to smile at death—how to smile at death, how to be tickled to death to die. Now, death is not a popular subject. As a matter of fact, when you mention death, people will change the subject like they change channels on the TV set. We've done everything we can do to avoid thinking about death. *Man is the only creature who knows he's going to die, and he's trying desperately to forget it.* That's the reason some overdo the makeup. That's the reason, when a fellow gets a certain age, if he can afford it, he buys a sports car. We're trying to do everything we can do to obscure the fact that we're winding down to the grave. And, even the grave—the burial places—we make them look like a memorial park, a garden of some kind. We don't like the idea of dying. But, death is a very real fact, as we're going to see, and it's something that we're not to be afraid of. Really, it's something that we ought to anticipate.

Now, David had that in mind, I'm certain, when he wrote this wonderful, beautiful psalm—and especially verse 4 (Psalm 23:4). He spoke of a valley called “the valley of the shadow of death”. And, there is such a valley in the land of Palestine; there is a valley called “the valley of the shadow of death.” If you were to go there, you could seek it out. It starts between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, up about 2,700 feet above sea level. There's a little spring that comes out of the hillside there, and it starts a little rivulet. And, sometimes it's full of water, and the water cascades down; and sometimes there's just a trickle that goes through it. But, over the centuries, it has cut a ravine—a chasm, if you will, a little Grand Canyon—in those Judean hills. It starts up there, and it flows down, down, down, down 1,300 feet below sea level to the Dead Sea.

This ravine—this canyon—is called “the valley of the shadow of death” because it is so narrow that at the bottom, in some places, it's only about 12-feet-wide. And, even at high noon, it's always full of shadows. There are caves there—shadowy places there. In Bible times, there were bears there, and hyenas there, and leopards there, and there were robbers. There were steep places where sheep might fall, and it was a frightening place with the grotesque shadows on the canyon wall. The shepherds had named it “the valley of the shadow of death.”

It was a very useful canyon—a very useful valley—because in the wintertime, when there was not much grass, the shepherds would take the sheep down to Jericho, and there the sheep would winter at Jericho and feed there in that lush grass that would grow even in the wintertime. Then, when the spring would come, and the green Judean hills would grow bright with that verdant color of green, and the flowers would come out and dot the hillside, the shepherd would lead his sheep through that valley to greener pastures in the highlands. And, that's surely what David had in mind when David wrote this beautiful psalm, because David himself, as a shepherd, doubtless, many times, led his sheep through that valley—the valley of the shadow of death. And, David said, “The Lord is to me what I've been to my sheep: *'The LORD is my shepherd... [And] yea,*

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:1–4).

David had learned to smile at death, and I want you to learn to smile at death. And, I want to give you three principles that will help you to do that.

I. Accept Death as a Decided Fact

Number one: I want you to accept death as a decided fact—F-A-C-T, fact. It is a fact. Now, notice how that verse begins: “*Yea*”—Y-E-A; not *nay*, “*yea*”—“*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psalm 23:4).

A. Death Is a Stubborn Fact

Now, as I said, that’s a fact that many people don’t want to face. We sometimes try to change the subject, but the Bible says in Hebrews 9, verse 27: “*It is appointed unto men once to die*” (Hebrews 9:27). That’s an appointment, my dear friend, that you have. “*It is appointed unto men once to die*” (Hebrews 9:27). And, the same Bible says in Romans chapter 5 and verse 12: “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*” (Romans 5:12). The only exception to whether or not you might die is if Jesus comes first. But, if Jesus does not come first, you’re certainly going to die. And so, death is, dear friend, a stubborn fact. We were talking a few moments about statistics. There’s a new statistic out on death: one out of one people die. Okay? One out of one. “*It is appointed unto men once to die*” (Hebrews 9:27).

B. Death Is an Uncertain Fact

But, not only is it a stubborn fact; it’s an uncertain fact. You don’t know when you’re going to die. You see, David said, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley*” (Psalm 23:4). He’s walking through the valley. He doesn’t know from one moment to the next what is going to happen. We live life a step at a time. The psalmist said, “*There is but a step between me and death*”—“*there is but a step between me and death*” (1 Samuel 20:3). “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psalm 23:4). It is a stubborn fact, but it is an uncertain fact. You don’t know when you’re going to die. Old men die, but sometimes mothers kiss their helpless babies and their innocent babies goodbye and leave them. Sometimes even a little child must drop his toys to grapple with the iron strength of death.

I must preach, dear friend, as a dying man would preach to dying men, because I don’t know—this may be the last sermon I’ll ever preach; it may be the last sermon you’ll ever hear. I don’t know; you don’t know. Many a time, I’ve preached the last sermon a person has heard before that person died. The Bible says in the Book of James, verse 13 and 14: “*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into*

such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. [So] that you ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (James 4:13–15). You see, God doesn’t have to take your life. All He has to do is stop giving it. Do you understand that? It’s of the Lord’s mercies that we’re not consumed. You see, dear friend, life is a gift from God. *“If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”* (James 4:15). Your life is like a vapor on a frosty morning, like a breath on a frosty morning—here for a moment and then gone.

C. **Death Is a Personal Fact**

You see, listen, accept death as a decided fact. It is a stubborn fact; it is an uncertain fact. And, I’ll tell you what else it is: it’s a personal fact. *“Yea, though I walk”—“I walk”* (Psalm 23:4). Not *“they walk”—“I walk”* (Psalm 23:4). You are walking in the valley of the shadow of death, just like David was.

Well, you know, when a preacher talks about people getting ready to die, you know what happens in the human mind? You know what the human mind says? “Tell ’em, Preacher. Tell ’em they’re going to die. Tell ’em to get ready. Tell ’em that they may die at any moment.” Friend, YOU may die at any moment. You say, “Well, I’m healthy right now.” You may not be as healthy as you think. But, you know, automobiles run over healthy people also. I want to tell you, my dear friend, that you are living on the very edge of eternity, which, incidentally, is going to be the subject of our message tonight: the light of the talk about the Second Coming of Jesus—“Living on the Edge of Eternity.” And, I certainly want you to be here.

But, death, my dear friend, is a stubborn fact. Death is an uncertain fact, and death is a personal fact. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4). Step number one—are you listening?—step number one in learning to smile at death is to look death straight in the face—look death straight in the face. Think about it. Bring it into focus, and say with David, *“Yea, though”—it’s there; yes, it’s there—“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4).

II. **Acknowledge Death as a Defeated Foe**

Now, there’s something else I want you to do. Number two: not only do I want you to accept death as a as a decided fact, but I want you to acknowledge death, dear friend, as a defeated foe—as a defeated foe. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”* (Psalm 23:4). There are three wonderful truths there, as we think about death as a defeated foe.

A. There Can Be No Valley Without Mountains

First of all, he talks about a valley—a valley. Now, learn this: there can be no valley without mountains. Isn't that true? It's impossible—it's impossible—for there to be a valley unless there are mountains. And, you see, this is the valley psalm between two mountain psalms. Psalm 22 is a mountain psalm: it deals with Mount Calvary, and it tells of the crucifixion of the Messiah. And then, Psalm 24 is a mountain psalm: it deals with the coronation of the Messiah; it deals with the Second Coming. So, Psalm 23 is a valley between two mountains. Over here are the blood-drenched slopes of Mount Calvary, and over here are the sunlit peaks of Mount Zion. And, over here we have crucifixion, and over here we have coronation. And, we are living in the valley.

Remember that we said that the Lord Jesus Christ is described as a shepherd three times in the New Testament. For example, the Lord Jesus is called “the Good Shepherd.” John 10, verse 11: *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11). Now, the Good Shepherd—that's Mount Calvary. And then, the Lord Jesus is called the chief Shepherd. First Peter chapter 5, verse 4: *“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”* (1 Peter 5:4). The Good Shepherd died for me; the chief Shepherd is coming for me. But then, also, the Lord Jesus is called the great Shepherd, and that's the One who now lives for me. Hebrews 13, verses 20 and 21: *“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus [Christ], that great shepherd of the sheep”* (Hebrews 13:20). You see, He's the One who rose from the dead. He's the One who has conquered the valley of the shadow of death. The Good Shepherd—He died for me. The chief Shepherd—He's coming for me. The great Shepherd—He lives for me. In the valley of the shadow of death, He was raised from the dead.

And so, what I'm trying to tell you, my dear friend, if you want to learn how to smile at death, understand, number one, there can be no valley without mountains. Thank God. *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help”* (Psalm 121:1). Are you down in the valleys? Then, look at the mountains, my dear friend. Look! Look, I say, to Mount Calvary, and look to Mount Zion.

B. There Can Be No Shadow Without Light

Secondly, there can be no shadow without a light. Notice what it says: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4). Now, death is just a shadow if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus has become the death of death. You see, *Jesus pulled the sting out of death. Jesus took the gloom out of the grave. Jesus took the dread out of dying, and Jesus had given us a hope that is steadfast and sure.* A shadow may frighten you, but a shadow cannot hurt you.

Joyce and I took a walk the other morning. We go for morning walks. And, we were

walking there along Grove Park. It was early in the morning, the sun was coming up, and the automobiles were going down Grove Park 25-, 35-, 40-miles-an-hour. They were coming down Grove Park. Joyce and I were walking north, and the cars were coming past; and the sun was making the shadows of the cars to come right down the sidewalk there. As we were walking down there, the shadow of those cars kept hitting us and running over us. Bang—one would hit. Bang—another would hit. Oh, it hurt. When those shadows would run over me, oh, it's terrible. You say, "Now, wait a minute, Pastor, the shadow couldn't hurt you." And, you're exactly right, dear friend. Now, if the automobile had hit me, that's one thing. There can be no shadow without a substance. All we were doing was being hit by shadows. And, it was kind of humorous to see those shadows come and run over us. You see, God made us to walk through shadows.

Now listen, there cannot be a shadow without a light. There was a great, great preacher whose wife died when she was still a very young woman—left a little girl in the family. The little girl didn't understand all of the intricacies about life and death, and Jesus dying for our sins, and all of that. But, after the funeral one day, the father was downtown. They were doing some shopping. The little girl was in the car, and she looked over on the wall of a department store and saw the shadow of a truck. The shadow was even larger than the truck, because the sun was setting low in the west and it made a huge shadow on the department store wall. The little girl said, "Daddy, look at the big shadow of the truck." And, he thought right then, "I'm going to teach her a lesson." And, he said, "Sweetheart, if you had your choice, would you rather be hit by the shadow of the truck or had you rather be hit by the truck?" "Oh," she said, "Daddy, that's easy. I'd much rather be hit by the shadow of that truck than to be hit by that truck." He said, "That's right, darling." He said, "It was only the shadow that hit mama. The truck hit Jesus 2,000 years ago at Calvary." Tremendous lesson—the truck hit Jesus. Jesus has taken the sting out of sin, the dread out of the grave. Jesus has become our victor. And, there cannot be a shadow unless there's a light.

Let me give you some verses here. I found these—what a blessing. Isaiah 9, verse 2: "*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: [and] they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined*" (Isaiah 9:2). There's no shadow without light. Are you in the valley of the shadow of death right now? Look to the light. And, I'll tell you, my dear friend, if you'll look to the light, the shadow will fall behind you. You won't even see it. Look to the light. There is no valley without mountains, and there is no shadow without a light.

C. There is No Evil Without Greater Good

There's a third thing I want you to learn as you see death as a defeated foe, and that is this: there is no evil without a greater good. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the*

shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). This time, now, he's comparing the evil with the great Shepherd—the great Shepherd of the sheep.

Who is the *Thou*? Who is he talking to? Who does David mean when he says, "*Thou art with me*" (Psalm 23:4)? Well, remember how this psalm begins? "*The LORD is my shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1). And, if you have the old *King James Version* of the Scripture, the word *Lord*—LORD—is in all caps, because that word *Lord* means "Jehovah," or, as some would say, "Yahweh." Actually, it's an unpronounceable word—just four consonants that cannot be pronounced. We pronounce it as best we know how: "Jehovah." But actually, "Yahweh," or, "*the LORD is my shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1)—it was the most sacred name for God that the Jews knew.

When Moses was getting ready to deliver the children of Israel out of bondage, he made excuses. He said, "I can't go. They won't believe me. Who shall I say sent me?" And, God said to Moses, "Moses, you tell them that I AM"—"that I AM"—"sent you" (Exodus 3:14). That is, "I am the great, eternal, personal God, the ever existing One who never had a beginning, the One who never had an ending—not I was, not I will be, but I AM. You tell them that I AM sent you." And then, He said, "You tell them Jehovah is My name"—"Jehovah is My name."

I told you last week that name *Jehovah* is not mentioned in the New Testament—only in the Old. Why? Because Jesus is our Jehovah. Let me tell you what happened: that name was so sacred that a Jew copying that name would go take a bath before he would copy that name, get a new pen before he would write down that name—that holy name, *Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah*. Do you know what the name *Jesus* means? It means "Jehovah saves"—"Jehovah saves."

Let me give you a little background. Just think about this: you remember when Moses could no longer lead the children of Israel? He had a man named Joshua who took his place—Joshua. But, Joshua's name wasn't always Joshua. His name was Hoshea—Hosea. That was his name. And, his name, *Hoshea*, means "salvation." Moses said, "I'm going to give you a new name, and I'm going to take Hoshea, a part of that name, and I'm going to take a part of the name, Jehovah, and I'm going to put them together. And then, so you have Jehoshea—Joshua. And, I'm going to put Jehovah and Hoshea, and I'll put them together; and I get a new name: 'Jehovah saves.'" Hoshea is salvation—Jehovah: "Jehovah saves." And, that was Joshua's name in the Old Testament. Now, in the New Testament, the name Jesus is the same as the Old Testament Jehovah. Jehovah—Old Testament. Jesus—New Testament. Both of those names are the same. Jesus is the Joshua of the of the New Testament. He is the "Jehovah saves" of the New Testament.

What was David saying? David's saying, "There may be evil, but Jehovah is with me." How much more can we say it? Jesus—Jehovah—is with us. There can be no

valley without mountains. There can be no shadow without a light. There can be no evil without a greater evil. Truth is mightier than error. Grace is greater than sin. Our sovereign is greater than Satan. And, life is greater than death. You've got to understand that. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou*"—Jehovah—"*art with me*" (Psalm 23:4).

III. See Death as a Delightful Friend

Now, my dear friend, there's a third thing I want you to learn, and it is this: not only must you see death as a decided fact, and not only must you see death as a defeated foe, but you need to see death as a delightful friend. "Pastor, did you say, 'friend—death'?" Yes, I said, "friend." I wanted to change that as I prepared this sermon, and I did change it. I said, "I'm going to change it to something else, because I just don't like calling death a *friend*." Then, I just came back, and I said, "No, I'm going to leave that there." Death is a delightful friend.

Let me give you an interesting verse: 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 22 and 23. The Apostle Paul is telling us what we have in Christ. The Corinthians had been arguing and squabbling a little bit about what preacher they liked best, and this is what Paul said: "*Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, now watch this, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's*" (1 Corinthians 3:22). Now, of the wonderful things he says belong to us, he says death belongs to us. It's one of our treasured possessions. It's yours; death is yours. He thinks of death, now, not as an enemy, but as a servant to help us.

Did you know the Bible says in Psalm 116, verse 15: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (Psalm 116:15)? Did you know that the apostle said in Philippians 1, verse 21: "*For me...to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21)? I mean, physically, it's gain. My body's going to be made like the Lord Jesus. Intellectually, it's gain, for I'll know as I am known. Emotionally, it is gain, because I'll be able to praise Him with my whole heart. Socially, it is gain, because I will be with the saints of all of the ages and with my Lord face-to-face. Spiritually, it is gain, because temptation and sin will be behind me, and I will be one with my Lord like never before. Now, what brings me into that relationship, my dear friend—what brings me there—is death. So, death is not an enemy if it helps me to come into a place like that. "*For me...to die is gain*" (Philippians 1:21).

A. The Presence of the Shepherd

Now, now listen—see why David thought of it as a friend. Now, notice what he says: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*"—now, watch—"*for thou art with me*" (Psalm 23:4). First of all, there is the presence—there is

the presence—of the Shepherd. *“Thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4).

You know, up until this time, he’s been talking about the Lord: *“The LORD is my shepherd... He maketh me to lie down...he leadeth me... He restoreth my soul...he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness... [His] rod and [His] staff”* (Psalm 23:1–4). But now, when he’s in the valley, it’s no longer talking *about* Him; he’s talking *to* Him: *“Thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). There’s nothing that will bring you face to face with God more than the dark valleys of life. But, when you get in the dark valleys of life, you’re going to know what He meant when He said, *“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). *“I will be with thee always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20). There is the presence of the Shepherd.

Now, who is the Shepherd? Jehovah. The Ultimate is my intimate. Think about it. I won’t have to cross Jordan alone. I’m not going to have to die alone. I tell you, when I come to die, my Lord is there with me. The light is there. The Shepherd is there. There is the presence of my Shepherd.

B. The Power of the Shepherd

But, not only is there the presence of my Shepherd; there is the power of my Shepherd: *“[His] rod and [His] staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4). What did I tell you the rod was for? To protect the sheep. What did I tell you the staff was for? To lift the sheep. My friend, when you come to die, I can promise you the Lord will be with you. He will strengthen you. I mean, there will be the presence of Jehovah God, who says, *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of [the] saints”* (Psalm 116:15). He will be there. His rod will be there to protect you from all of the powers of evil, and His staff will be there to draw you up close to Him as you walk through that valley. As your feet touch those chilly waters of the river of death, singing, you can go along your way.

C. The Purpose of the Shepherd

Not only is there, my dear friend, the presence of the Shepherd and the power of the Shepherd; there is the purpose of the Shepherd. What is the purpose of the Shepherd? It is through the valley. It’s not a box canyon; it’s a valley, dear friend. And, Jesus has kicked the end out of the grave. I want you to know that He’s bringing us through. And, you may be in some trouble today, and you may be in some difficulty today. But, I want to tell you, my dear friend, it’s only for a season; it’s only for a purpose. David knew enough about a shepherd to know that a shepherd would never leave his sheep through any place like that unless he’s leading them to a better place.

Somebody asked a man—he said, *“What’s your favorite verse?”* He said, *“That one that says, ‘It came to pass.’”* *“So, why is that your favorite?”* He said, *“I know it didn’t come to stay; it came to pass.”* Whatever it is, dear friend, it has come to pass, and we are going through. I love the song that we sing:

*All the way my Savior leads me;
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy,
Who through life has been my Guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.*

—FANNY CROSBY

The purpose of the Shepherd is to lead us through.

Now, my dear friend, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 2 that the devil keeps people in bondage through the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). You listen to me: *you are not ready to live until you're no longer afraid to die*—*you are not ready to live until you're no longer afraid to die*. “Well,” you say, “with my sins, though, I’m afraid to die. What shall I do with my sins?” I’ll tell you what to do with your sins: you put your faith where God puts your sins—on Jesus. Just put your faith where God puts your sins—on Jesus. “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6).

Conclusion

Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. I want to help you, right now, to know that death has no more terrors for you, to be able to smile at death, to settle the death question so you can now begin to live the life question. If you’re not certain that you’re saved, may I invite you to pray a prayer like this: “Dear God”—would you just pray that way, just quietly now? Forget any one else is here. You can be saved right where you are in your seat, this morning. Just pray this way—“Dear God, I know You love me, and I know You want to save me. Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd: You died for this lost sheep; You died for me. And Lord, You are the great Shepherd: You’ve been raised from the dead. And, You’re the chief Shepherd: You’re coming again. And, I want You to be my Shepherd. I open my heart. I receive You now, right this moment, as my Savior and as my Lord. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus”—would you ask Him that, right now?—“Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Forgive my sin and save me. Thank You for doing it, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus, for doing it. And, Lord Jesus, help me never, ever to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

Making a Friend with Death

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: May 8, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:4

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

PSALMS 23:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. You Must Accept Death as a Decided Fact
 - A. Death Is a Stubborn Fact
 - B. Death Is an Unpredictable Fact
 - C. Death Is a Personal Fact
- II. You Must Accept Death as a Defeated Foe
 - A. There Can Be No Valleys Without Mountains
 - B. There Can Be No Shadows Without Light
 - C. There Can Be No Evil Without Good
- III. You Must Accept Death as a Delightful Friend

Conclusion

Introduction

Now, take your Bibles and turn, please, to Psalm 23. I suppose that the verse that I'm going to share with you tonight is one of the best known and best loved verses in all of the Bible. I think many of you know it by heart. It's verse 4 of this wonderful psalm: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).

I want to talk to you tonight on this subject: *“Making a Friend with Death.”* You know, *man is the only creature who knows that he's going to die, and he's trying desperately to forget it.* That's the reason that when a man gets to be a certain age, he buys a sports car. That's the reason why some women overdo the cosmetics. It's the reason that some immerse themselves in sports, in business, in other things—because they don't want to look death in the face. People today don't like to go to funerals. They only go if they feel they must. And, we take our cemeteries, and we try to make them look like parks, because we're trying to camouflage the fact of death. We don't like to think about death. And, if you mention death, people will change the subject like they switch channels on the television set. Why is that? Because we're afraid of death.

As a matter of fact, the fear of death keeps people in bondage. The Bible makes that very clear. Hebrews 2:14–15 puts it this way: *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood”*—the children he’s talking about are the children of God—*“he also”*—and that’s speaking of Jesus Himself—*“took part of the same”*—that is, we are flesh and blood, and Jesus became flesh and blood. Now, listen to this—*“that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”*—and notice this—*“And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14–15). Any man who is afraid to die will live his life a slave. Until you’re no longer afraid to die, you’re not yet ready to live. And so, I want to talk to you tonight about how to make a friend out of death, to take the morose and to remove the fear and the dread from it.

This wonderful verse talks of the valley of the shadow of death. Now, there is such a valley. And, David, who wrote this psalm, knew the valley well. It’s called the Wadi Qelt. And, if you ever visited Jerusalem, you’ll have a chance to see the valley of the shadow of death. It starts there in the Mount of Olives somewhere, high up—about 2,700 feet above sea level—and it is a ravine. It is a valley that moves eastward down toward the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the lowest spot on earth, about 1300 feet below sea level. And, this ravine starts up there and comes down toward the Dead Sea. And, there are steep and severe precipices and walls. It’s like a miniature Grand Canyon. Some places to look over will almost make you dizzy. Some places it’s 1500-foot-deep looking straight down. And, in Bible times, it was a place where there would be bears, and leopards, and hyenas, and lions, and also there would be robbers and highwaymen, marauders, because there would be limestone caves. And, those caves are still there today. And, people would lie in wait, waiting for people to travel through that valley, the valley of the shadow of death. And, the sunlight, as you watch it, will make shadows—sometimes grotesque shadows—on the canyon walls. I’ve seen that valley many times. It’s always intriguing to me.

In the wintertime, the shepherds would take their sheep down to Jericho. Jericho—that’s so much in the news today. And, those sheep would winter in Jericho. But, when the spring comes and the flowers begin to bloom on the mountainsides, and that grass begins to turn green and succulent, the shepherds would take their sheep from the lowlands down from the oasis of Jericho down by the Dead Sea and would lead those sheep up through that ravine, because that was the easiest way to go—the simplest way up through the valley of the shadow of death, up to beautiful—incredibly beautiful and wonderful—pastures of succulent grass there on the hillsides. And, doubtless, David, who was a shepherd boy who knew this land, had led his sheep many times through this valley, known there and known today as “the valley of the shadow of death.” And, David, being a poet, one day, sat down and wrote these words: “Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Now, I want you to learn three principles out of this verse—verse 4—and these are principles that will cause you to make a friend out of death, where you don’t have to be in bondage anymore. You don’t have to be afraid of death; you can meet death with a smile on your face.

I. You Must Accept Death as a Decided Fact

Principle number one: You must accept death as a decided fact.

A. Death Is a Stubborn Fact

Death is a stubborn fact. Notice how this verse begins: “*Yea*”—that means “yes”—“*[Yes], though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psalm 23:4). Death is a *yea*, and not a *nay*. It is a fact. Hebrews 9:27 says, “*It is appointed unto [man] once to die.*” Romans 5:12 says, “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin...so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*” You’re going to die. The only possible exception to that is that Jesus will come before we die. That is the only exception that the Bible makes. You have an appointment with death.

Now, again, people refuse to think about death, and they think if they don’t think about it, that somehow they don’t have to deal with it. But, to put death out of your mind and to shove it down into your sub-consciousness does not really alleviate it; it only gets in the subconscious where it increases anxiety. Bring death out. Look death straight in the face. Accept the fact of death. As I’ve told you before, there are many statistics that deal with death, but one that I think is the best is this: one out of one people die. That is a fact. Accept death as a stubborn fact.

B. Death Is an Unpredictable Fact

And, death is not only a stubborn fact; death is an unpredictable fact. Notice this verse says, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*” (Psalm 23:4). Each step we take we take in the shadow of death. We don’t know when we’re going to die. James puts it this way in the Book of James—he says in James 4:13–14: “*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will [enter] into [such and] such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little [while], and then vanisheth away.*” He’s saying that our life is fragile; it’s like the morning fog: it’s here, and then it’s gone. None of us know when we’re going to die. Proverbs 27:1 says, “*Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*” That’s the reason that old-time preachers used to say to other preachers, “Preach as a dying man would preach to dying men.” This may be the last sermon I’ll ever preach. It may

be the last sermon you'll ever hear. But, you say, "Wait a minute, Pastor. Wait a minute. I am in fine health." Well, fine health won't help you if you get hit by an automobile tonight.

Where I used to pastor in a particular city, five people in one car on their way home from church—taken *just like that* in an automobile accident. In another city down there at Merritt Island, Brother Jim, Dorothy stood on the steps of Merritt Island. I remember she was one of the finest ladies, with the brightest smile, in our church. I can see her face right now. I have the whole picture in my mind. I was standing on this side of the door, shaking her hand as she came out. She put a bright smile on her face, and Dorothy said, "Pastor, that was a great sermon. I'll see you tonight." And, going over the Banana River Causeway she met another car coming on the wrong side, and *just like that*, she stepped into Heaven.

You know, we always think the other person is going to die. We all have it figured out just how we're going to die. We're going to get very old. We're going to get into our late 90s. And then, we're going to go to the doctor, and he's going to thump us on the chest at \$5.00 a thump. And then, he's going to say, "Well, you've got six month to live." And then, what we're going to do is to get out the lockbox, and go over the insurance papers, and revise our will. Then, we're going to invite all of the children, and the grandchildren, and the great grandchildren in, and we're going to kiss them all goodbye. Then, we're going to put on a new pair of pajamas, get in bed, turn up our toes, and pull the covers up, and die. Now, that's the way we think we're going to die. We think that other people are going to die suddenly, unexpectedly, but not us. And, you know what you're saying right now? "That's right, Preacher, tell 'em—tell 'em." But, we don't know when we're going to die. I mean, death is something that we don't know about.

One of my favorite stories is a about a man in Baghdad who came to his master one time, and he said, "Master, you've got to help me." And, the master said, "What's wrong?" And, he said, "Master, I was in the marketplace, and a sinister figure jostled me in the market place. I looked him in the face, and it was Death. Master, please loan me your finest Arabian horse. I must flee to Samara or else Death will get me." The master said, "Go to the stable and take the finest horse and flee." And then, he went himself down to the marketplace to see if, indeed, Death was there in the marketplace. He saw this sinister figure with a hood. He tapped him on the shoulder. And, he turned around, and the man looked at him and said, "I want to ask you a question. Are you Death?" And, Death said, "Yes, I'm Death." He said, "I want to ask you another question: Why did you frighten my servant today in the marketplace?" "Oh," said Death, "I didn't mean to frighten him. I was surprised to see him here. He startled me. I was not expecting to see him in the marketplace here today, for you see, I have an appointment with him tonight in Samara." Death is like that, friend. We're not going to escape death. *"It is*

appointed unto [man] once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). Death is a stubborn fact. It is an unpredictable fact.

C. **Death Is a Personal Fact**

It is a personal fact. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" (Psalm 23:4)—"I walk." Take this message tonight, now, and personalize it, as I'm trying to do.

I've told you before about a friend of mine whose name was Bob McNamee, one of the finest preachers I've ever known. Bob McNamee was about 2 inches taller than I am. He was a fisherman. And, Bob and I used to fish together when I pastored down on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. He pastored a little church about 15 miles from where I pastored. He and I rode back and forth together to seminary in the mornings. We would talk theology. We would talk preaching. We would talk soul winning. Bob McNamee said to me, "Adrian, there's an old man that lives on your church field. His name is Mr. Buchwa. He's had several serious heart attacks. Adrian, would you go by and talk to Mr. Buchwa?" And, this is the way Bob said it: he said, "Adrian, he has one foot in the grave and the other foot on a banana peel." He said, "Adrian, he's about to die. He just has days to live. Please go by, and speak to Mr. Buchwa, and talk to him about Christ." I said, "Bob, I'll do it."

I went up to Mr. Buchwa's house, knocked on the door. The old gentleman came to the door, and I said, "Sir, you don't know me, but my name is Adrian Rogers, and I'm a Baptist preacher. May I come in and talk with you a while? I want to talk to you about Jesus. I want to tell you how you can be saved and know that you're going to Heaven when you die." Mr. Buchwa said, "Come in." I sat down, shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with that old man, and he prayed and asked Christ to come into his heart. It was like picking a ripe apple. He just fell off in my hand, and I believe he was wonderfully saved. But, that's not the end of the story.

Bob McNamee, the young seminarian, the preacher man, the tall, sun-crowned man with the big grin, the man who was the soul winner who loved God, a few days after that, was having lunch with his wife. They had a delightful lunch. And, Bob got up from the table, walked a few steps across the living room, gave a gasp, folded up like a jackknife, and fell dead—the young man. He was the one who said to me, "Adrian, there's an old man that lives on your church field. He only has days to live." That old man lived for years; it was Bob who only had days to live.

You know, we're always thinking that death is for the other fellow, isn't it? Death is, friend, a stubborn fact. Death is an unpredictable fact. Death is a personal fact. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death*" (Psalm 23:4).

Now, I don't want to be somber, but you'll never make a friend of death, you'll never

deal with the fear of death, you'll never be delivered from the bondage of death until you accept the fact of death. Just accept it. It is a fact.

II. You Must Accept Death as a Defeated Foe

Number two: Not only should you take death as a definite fact, but also, accept death as a defeated foe—a defeated foe. Now, listen to what David said: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”* (Psalm 23:4). Why could he say that? Well, notice what he called death.

A. There Can Be No Valleys Without Mountains

He called death, first of all, a valley: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4). Now, I don't want to insult your intelligence, but it is impossible to have a valley without mountains. Isn't that true? It's mountains that make valleys.

And, Psalm 23 is the valley psalm because it is located between two mountain psalms. Psalm 23 comes as, you could easily figure out, between Psalm 22 and Psalm 24. In Psalm 22, you have a picture of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 is written as if someone were standing on Mount Calvary. Psalm 22 is written as an eyewitness account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is an incredible psalm, and it describes Christ dying on the cross. Psalm 24 is another mountain psalm, and it speaks of Mount Zion, and it speaks of Christ reigning on Mount Zion. You have two mountains. You have, in Psalm 22, Mount Calvary; in Psalm 24, Mount Zion, the glory mount. And, in between Calvary and the coronation of the King you have the valley. And so, where are we living? Well, we're in a valley, a valley that is marked by death. We live between Mount Calvary and Mount Zion. We're in the valley between. But remember, friend, that we are only in the valley temporarily. We live positive and walking that valley between the blood-drenched slopes of Calvary and the sunlit peaks of Glory. And, when you think of the valley—when you think of the valley—remember that there cannot be a valley without mountains. And, what wonderful mountains these are that make this valley!

B. There Can Be No Shadows Without Light

And, furthermore, there can be no shadows without light. Look at it: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (Psalm 23:4). Now, for every valley there must be mountains, and for every shadow there must be a light. And, what is the light in the dark valley that makes death a defeated foe? Christ is the light.

Put these verses down. Isaiah 9:2: *“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: [and] they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined”*—*“they that dwell in the [valley of the shadow of death]”*—*“in the land of the*

shadow of death—“*upon them hath the light shined.*” Or, put this verse down—Luke 1:78–79: “*Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us*”—the *dayspring* means “the sun”—“*To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.*” There cannot be a valley without mountains. There cannot be a shadow without light.

And, a shadow may frighten you, but a shadow cannot hurt you. The shadow of a dog can’t bite you. The shadow of a sword cannot cut you. The shadow of an automobile cannot run over you.

Joyce and I walk in the morning, sometimes early. The sun is coming up, and the cars come down our street. I’m walking on the sidewalk, and the cars are over here on our street. And, as the cars go by over here, the shadows keep running over me. Sometimes I try to jump over the shadows to see if I can jump over a whole car at one time. As the cars are coming toward me, the shadows keep running over me. But, you know, I don’t feel it—I don’t feel it. The car is over here. The car doesn’t hit me. It is not death; it is the shadow of death. A shadow may frighten you, but it cannot hurt you. The car doesn’t hit me. It is not death; it is the shadow of death. A shadow may frighten you, but it cannot hurt you.

One great preacher lost his wife while he was still a young man. He was trying to explain death and the shadow of death to his little girl, but she didn’t quite understand. One day, they’d gone downtown to do some shopping. The little girl was sitting in the car, and the sun was setting in the west. And, the sun had made a shadow on a department store; it was the shadow of a truck. And, the little girl was impressed by that. And, when her daddy got in the car, she said, “Daddy, look at the shadow of the truck. Look at that big shadow, Daddy.” And, he, being a good teacher, said, “Sweetheart, I want to ask you a question: Had you rather be hit by the truck or by the shadow of the truck?” “Oh,” she said, “that’s easy: I’d much rather be hit by the shadow than the truck, because the shadow can’t hurt you.” And, he said, “That’s right, sweetheart. And, it was only a shadow that hit Mama. The truck hit Jesus 2000 years ago on the cross.” Now, you think about that, friend. One of the greatest lessons that he could taught that little girl is that Jesus is the One that takes the pain out of parting, Jesus is the One that takes the gloom out of the grave, Jesus is the One that takes the sting out of death. Jesus is the light, and there cannot be a shadow without a light.

Listen to this again—Isaiah 9:2: “*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: [and] they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*” As a matter of fact, if you keep your face toward the light, the shadow will fall behind you. You won’t even be able to see it.

C. There Can Be No Evil Without Good

There can be no valley without mountains. There can be no shadow without light, and there can be no evil without good. *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”* (Psalm 23:4). What is evil? Evil is only distinguished as a contradiction to good—a contradiction to good. And so, while there is evil, if there’s evil, there must be good, because evil is meaningless unless there is good. And, greater is that good than the evil. The Bible says, *“Where sin did abound, grace does much more abound”* (Romans 5:20). And, *“greater is he that’s in us than he that’s in the world”* (1 John 4:4). What evil then should we fear when we know Him? The Bible says in John 10:10: *“The thief cometh not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”*—but Jesus said—*“[I’ve] come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* Grace is greater than sin. Truth is stronger than error, and life must triumph over death.

Now, what I’ve said to you is this, friend: that death is a decided fact; death is a defeated foe. Jesus, on the cross, became the death of death.

III. You Must Accept Death as a Delightful Friend

Now, here’s the third thing I want you to learn: death that is a decided fact, and death that is a defeated foe has now become a delightful friend. Death now is a delightful friend. Notice what this verse says: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).

Now, notice the word “through the valley”—not *into* the valley; *through* the valley. David knew that when he took his sheep from the lowlands and began to lead them through that valley, he was leading them to a delightful place, to a wonderful place, to succulent pastures. He was leading them to the highlands—out of the heat into the cool, into the pastures; leading them beside still waters, leading them into green pastures. That valley, to those sheep, was not a foe, but a friend.

One of the most amazing verses in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 3:22–23, when the Apostle Paul is telling us what we have in Christ, and I want you to listen to it. He says this—they were discussing which pastor they wanted to follow, which preacher they liked the best, and Paul rebukes them for that; and he says, *“Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your’s”* (1 Corinthians 3:22). And, while he is listing the assets, while he is listing the things that the Christians put not on the negative side of the ledger, but on the positive side of the ledger, he mentions death. Death is one of God’s gifts. Listen to it again: *“Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your’s; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s”* (1 Corinthians 3:22–23). Death now has become a delightful friend. That’s the reason the

Bible says in Psalm 116:15: *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”*

The Apostle Paul, when he looked at the dark valley that David called “the valley of the shadow of death,” he said in Philippians 1:21: *“For...me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”—“to die is gain.”* That’s not a loss. Physically, it’s gain because we leave all the pain and the sorrow that comes with a body that has and wears and bears the curse of sin. Intellectually, it is a gain because when we die, then we know as we’re known, and all of the mysteries of life are unraveled, and we see Him face to face. Socially, it’s a gain because we meet the saints of all of the ages, and we meet our loved ones who’ve gone before, and we wait there for others who are coming, as our circle of friends will get wider and wider and wider through all eternity. Spiritually, it’s a gain. Paul says, “I have a desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). “One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase... It will be worth it all when we see Jesus” (Esther Kerr Rusthoi). Death is a delightful friend. It is ours. It brings us into the presence of the Shepherd.

Notice what he says: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). Now, notice when he begins the psalm, he’s talking about God: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want”* (Psalm 23:1). That’s theology. But, when he’s in the valley, he says, *“Thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). That is experience. God is near when we suffer. God is near when we’re sick. God is near—very near—when we die. You will not go through that valley alone. The Ultimate will be your intimate. Almighty God will be with you. Hebrews 13:5 says, *“Let your [behavior] be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”* Isaiah 41:10 says, *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”*

You have the presence of the Shepherd when you die, and you have the power of the Shepherd when you die. He says, *“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4). The rod was to beat off the wild beasts. The staff was to lift the fallen sheep and direct the sheep. David himself had killed a lion and a bear, protecting his own sheep. And, there’s nothing that death can bring that we need to fear because we have the presence and the power of the Shepherd with us. That’s the reason the Apostle Paul could echo David and say in Romans 8:38–39: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* *“Thou art with me”—“thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4).

Conclusion

Death is a decided fact. Death is a defeated foe, and death becomes a delightful friend. You say, “Pastor, does that mean that I ought to desire to die?” No, you ought to desire to live. God wants you to live until time to die. Why is that? God puts an instinct for preservation in your heart because God knows that we’re needed here. Paul said, “I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, but it’s needful that I stay here to be with you” (Philippians 1:23–24). But, when time comes, and when the Lord says your days are up, then, my dear friend, remember this: that you can look death in the face with a smile. And, if you visit your doctor, and your doctor says you’re going to die, just try to be nice about it. But, just look him in the face and say, “Doctor, you’re wrong. Jesus said, ‘*He that [lives] and [believes] in me shall never die*’—‘*shall never die*’ (John 11:26). You’re wrong, Doctor.”

Now, this old body may wear out. Yes, I may wind down and go into the grave, but you’re looking at a man who cannot die. He cannot. “He that lives, that believes, in Me shall never die” (John 11:26).

Now, all of this is true only if, and always because, you can say, “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Now, if you can’t say that, you can’t claim any of this. But, if you can say it and mean it—“the Lord is my Shepherd”—you can also say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I’ll fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

I’ve been to the deathbed many times. I’ve held the hand of the dying many times. And, I have seen people who were afraid of the act of dying, but I’ve never known a child of God who was afraid to die. Oh, the act of dying—yes. We don’t want to go through it because we’ve never gone through it, and that’s a God-given preservation instinct. But, we know that we know that we know that we have the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. And, I want to remind you one more time: *you’re not ready to live until you’re no longer afraid to die*. And, in Christ, we have the victory.

Father, seal the message to our hearts. In Jesus’s name.

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed—no one stirring—if you’ve not yet received the Lord as your Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, if you’ve not yet trusted Him to save you, I want to help you to do it right now. I want to lead you in a prayer. And, right where you are tonight, in this room, you can receive Christ and be saved. Would you pray like this: “O God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. God, I need to be saved. I’m a sinner. I’ve broken Your law. I’ve sinned against You. My sin deserves judgment, but I want mercy. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me if I would only trust You. I do trust You, Jesus. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus”? Would you pray that prayer? “Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus”—pray it

from your heart; say it and mean it—“Save me, Lord Jesus.”

Did you pray it? Did you ask Him? Did you say, “Jesus, save me”? Did you mean it? You did? Then thank Him by faith. Pray this way: “Thank You for saving me, Jesus. I don’t deserve it, but I receive it now by faith, like a child. You’re now my Lord, my Savior, my God, and my friend. And now, Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You. And, Lord Jesus, give me the courage now to be obedient, and to make this public, and to follow You in baptism. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

How to Feel Good about God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 18, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 23:5

*“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”*

PSALMS 23:5

Outline

Introduction

- A. The Prepared Table
 - B. The Anointing of the Head
 - C. The Overflowing Cup
 - I. The Fullness That We Have in Christ
 - A. A Table of Replenishment
 - B. A Table of Restoration
 - C. A Table of Remembrance and Redemption
 - II. The Freshness That We Have in Christ
 - III. The Freeness That We Have in Christ
- Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and find Psalm 23. And, I think in Psalm 23, you’ll find there the heartbeat of God’s Word. Now, we have been studying this psalm for the past several Sundays, and we’re going to continue. Today, our major emphasis is going to be on verse 5, but before I read it to you, let me tell you what the devil wants to do to you—pay attention: the devil wants you to think negatively about God. That’s what he does. He wants you, when you think of God, not to have good feelings; he wants you to have negative feelings, because the devil knows if he can get you to thinking negatively about God, he can do almost anything with you that he wants.

What did he do in the Garden of Eden when he came to Eve? There, when he appeared as the serpent and first crawled his slimy, corroding tail into the pages of history, he asked Eve a question: he said, *“Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”* (Genesis 3:1). Now, God didn’t say any such thing, anyway. God did not say, *“Of the fruit of every tree of the garden thou shalt not eat.”* God said just the opposite: *“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat”* (Genesis 2:16)—“with the exception of just one tree, freely eat. Help yourself” (Genesis 2:17). Do you see what

the devil did? He tried to get Eve to think negatively about God.

And, he's still doing that job today, and people today think of God as some kind of a cosmic killjoy: every time He sees any body having a good time, He moves in to break up the party. People just think negatively about God, and when they think about serving God, they think of it as something that they have to do in order to get to Heaven, not something they want to do. It's like taking bad medicine in order to get well: you don't like the taste of the medicine, but you choke it down because the only alternative is being sick. Oh, no, my dear friend, what a distorted idea of the goodness of our great God!

I want to talk to you today about how to feel good about God. Take God's Word, and look in Psalm 23. Look at it: "*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*"—and then, our verse for this morning—"*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over*" (Psalm 23:1–5). And, I submit, in that verse, there's much to make us feel good about God.

Now, let me give you the background of this passage of Scripture.

A. **The Prepared Table**

First of all, we have what we call "a prepared table": "*Thou preparest a table before me*" (Psalm 23:5). That means that God sets the table. Who sets the table in your house? "Well," you say, "it all depends." It depends on what? "Well, it depends on who's coming." Now, if no one's coming, sometimes Joyce will let me set the table, and I never can get it right. Now, here I am, a semi-intelligent man—I never can remember just which side the silverware goes on. And, every time I think I've got it right, she says, "You did it wrong again." Either I put the spoon on the wrong side of the fork, or the fork on the knife, or something. There's a pattern to that, and it's very simple. She says, "Now look, how can you be the pastor of a church, how can you be a college graduate, and you can't even get the silverware right?" But, somehow I've just got a mental block about that. But, even sometimes the children will set the table.

But, my dear friends, when company is coming, generally, Joyce will set the table. No longer do we have the placemats; we have the linen tablecloth. No longer do we have the glass; we get the crystal. No longer do we have everyday dishes; the best china comes out. And, there will be lighted candles on the table with fresh flowers. Generally, you know, that wonderful recipe, and everything is just right, and the music will be playing softly in the background. And, when our guests come in, we say, "You'll

just have to take us like we are.” We really love to set the table. Do you know why you set the table that way? Do you know why you prepare the table? You know why? To honor the person who’s coming.

You see, here’s what David is saying: “God has put on an apron. God—Jehovah—has prepared a table for me—for me. The Lord of Glory has prepared a table for me. He loves me. He welcomes me. I’m special to Him” (Psalm 23:5).

B. The Anointing of the Head

And then, the next phrase says, “*Thou anointest my head with oil*” (Psalm 23:5). In the Middle Eastern home, there, in a very wealthy home, would be a cruse of oil right by the door—very expensive ointment, perfumed—and it would be there for special occasions. When a very important guest would come into the home—maybe a family who had been gone for a long time or someone that you dearly loved, someone that you wanted to see—the guest would come and greet his friend, and there would be a kiss on either cheek. And then, he would reach into that bowl of ointment, and he would put that ointment on the face, and the head, and the hair of his guest. It would perfume that person, and refresh them. They called it “the anointing of the head.”

And, the rest of the feast that person would smell that sweet perfume and that ointment that was on his head. They do something like this in Hawaii. When you come into a home in Hawaii, they take a ring of flowers called a “lei,” and they put it around your neck. And, the whole time you’re there, you’re just smelling those flowers that are around your neck. It’s their way of saying, “We love you. You’re special. You’re welcome.” Now, if the lady from next door came over to borrow an egg, or some flour, or something, they didn’t anoint her head and so forth. But, it was something special.

Remember there the story where Mary took that alabaster box of ointment and anointed the hairs of Jesus and even His feet? There was a man there named Simon. And, Simon and others were complaining, and Jesus said, “Simon, you didn’t anoint My head when I came into your house. You didn’t do this.” That is, “Simon, you did not show Me that reverence and that respect. But, this woman has not only anointed My head, but My feet with this ointment and this perfume.”

You see, it says that you’re very, very special. And, this anointing was to refresh and just to make you feel good. You’re special.

C. The Overflowing Cup

And then, the last thing—not only was there the prepared table and the anointing of the head, there was something else that was so very wonderful: there was the overflowing cup. “*My cup runneth over*” (Psalm 23:5).

Now, let me give you the background for this. In Bible times, they didn’t have the hotels, and motels, and the restaurants, and the things that we have today. Now, there

were a few inns, but most of them were dirty and filthy; and the few that were there were crowded. For example, with Jesus, there was no room in the inn. They were expensive and, many times, very immoral. But, there was a law in the land—the law of hospitality—that if you were travelling, and you came to a man’s house in the middle of the day and asked for food, it would be absolutely unthinkable that he would let you go on without first feeding you. It was just simply the law of the land that a stranger would be invited in and be given a meal.

Now, suppose that stranger came about evening time. It’s in the evening, and he sits down; and you give him this meal. Now, suppose you have done your duty. You’ve been respectful. You’ve been nice. You’ve fed him, and it’s time for him to go on. But, suppose you really have come to like this person. You even strike up a friendship, and you’re very interested; and he’s an interesting conversationalist. Or, you just feel, for whatever reason, that you want him to stay. Here’s the way they would do it: the host would take his cup at the end of the meal—and it had been already imbibed, emptied—and the host would take the pitcher, and if it was time for this man to go, he would fill that cup half full. And, what that meant was, “Mister, when you finish your dessert, hit the road. I mean, that’s it. The cup is half full.” He wouldn’t have to say a word.

But, if the host would come with that pitcher and begin to pour into that cup and would pour it up to the brim and then just let it overflow and run over, it was saying, “You’re special. I love you. You are invited to stay in my home overnight as a special guest.” That’s what David is saying. David is saying, “He (Jehovah) has prepared a table for me. I’m special. Jehovah has anointed my head. He loves me. My cup runneth over. He’s showing hospitality to me. He is my friend.” And, of course, who is our Jehovah? The Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Jesus said—John 15, verse 15: *“I call you not servants...but I have called you friends”* (John 15:15). Isn’t that beautiful? Don’t you think negatively about a friend.

What is a friend anyway? Somebody says, “A friend is somebody who knows all about you, and loves you just the same.” Or, somebody said that “a friend is someone who goes on liking you no matter how successful either one of you becomes.” Or, here’s a good definition: “A friend is somebody who believes in you when you have ceased to believe in yourself.” Or, “A friend is a source of celebration when you’ve come to believe that there’s nothing to celebrate. A friend is somebody who comes to your side when you call and often answers even before you call.” And, of course, we know that all of those things picture the Lord Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners. Erma Bombeck has said, “A friend doesn’t go on a diet because you are fat.” We are all in need of friends. And, what the scripture is showing here in Psalm 23, verse 5 is that the Lord is a friend—the Lord is a friend. What a friend we have in the Lord Jesus! “He prepares a table. He anoints my head with oil. My cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5). Don’t

you ever let the devil get you to think negatively about God.

There are three things I want you to think about the Lord, as we think about the Lord in this verse of Scripture.

I. The Fullness That We Have in Christ

First of all, as you think about the prepared table, I want you to think of the fullness that we have in Christ. Jesus Christ meets the deepest hungers of our hearts, and He satisfies the deepest longings, the deepest hungers, of your heart. Jesus satisfies.

A. A Table of Replenishment

Did you know that the Bible is just kind of a continual feast from Genesis right on to Revelation? They're always having suppers, and dinners, and banquets, and feasts all the through the Bible. Sometimes people criticize us for the fact that we like to get together and fellowship around a meal. Friend, that is so biblical.

I was thinking about all of the feasts and the meals that our Lord prepared for His disciples—the Good Shepherd. I was thinking, for example, about how the Lord Jesus Christ fed the 5,000, and He performed a miracle to feed 5,000. A few fish and loaves—and He fed 5,000 people. He prepared a table of replenishment when there was the enemy of inadequacy. And, you know, He's done that for me so many times. I feel so inadequate, and I run out of resources. And, the Lord just prepares a table before me when frankly, folks, I need it, but I don't deserve it. And, bless God, I can't even explain it—how He meets my need day by day.

And, I'm not just talking about physical needs—those, but more than that. I want to ask you a question: Was there any way that you could explain the feeding of the 5,000? Not any way except God. Isn't that right? Let me ask you this question: What is there about your life that cannot be explained apart from God? Do you know that's the only part that you have that you can call believable? Only the unexplainable—that's the only right you have to be a believer. I mean, if your neighbor can explain you and you're just like him, only you're religious, friend, that's not going to convince him. But, when he sees God, who is supernaturally meeting your needs and preparing for you a table of replenishment, then you're going to be believable.

B. A Table of Restoration

Not only a table of replenishment, but what about a table of restoration? Do you remember when Simon Peter cursed, and swore, and denied the Lord Jesus? Jesus was crucified, and He was raised from the dead. The disciples were discouraged, and they weren't sure—half-believing, half-doubting. Peter said, *“I go a fishing”* (John 21:3). The others went with him. They'd gone back to Galilee and had said, *“Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). There they

were, disobedient, disconsolate, out there fishing. And, they fished all night, hadn't caught anything. Boy, I've been on some of those. And then, Jesus says, "Hey, have you caught anything?" (standing on the seashore). Don't you hate people when they do that? "Have you caught anything?" And, they said, "No." He said, "Well, why don't you cast your net on the other side?" (John 21:6). And, they did, and do you remember? They caught all of those fish, and Peter—he knew it was Jesus. He said, "It's the Lord."

Peter took off his fisherman's coat, and jumped in the water, and made his way over there to meet the Lord Jesus. And, when he got there, what had the Lord done? Prepared a table. There were fish on those hot coals and fresh bread. Now, I can understand the fish. He was there by Galilee. I can understand where He got the fish, but where did He get that bread? I really don't know, but you know what I like to think? I like to think He turned stones into bread. "I'll do it when I want to, not when you want Me to." But, whatever, however, can you imagine fishing all night? Do you know how hungry you get when you've been working nets all night long and it's breakfast time? And, there on the shore, they smell that hot baked bread, and Jesus says, "*Come and dine*"—"Come and dine" (John 21:12). "*Thou preparest a table before me*" (Psalm 23:5)—not only a table of replenishment, but a table of restoration. Have you failed Him? Probably. You haven't cursed, and sworn, and denied Him like Peter did, but I want to tell you, my dear, failing friend, He says, "*Come and dine*" (John 21:12).

C. A Table of Remembrance and Redemption

There, just before He was crucified, He had the Passover feast. And, He sat down with them, and broke the bread. He was the host there at that table. He passed the cup and said, "*This do in remembrance of me*" (1 Corinthians 11:24). Not only a table of replenishment and a table of restoration, but a table of remembrance and redemption. Oh, thank God that we can sit down and feast at the table He has prepared for us! But listen, the best table is yet to come. Jesus said, "*I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom*" (Mark 14:25). Where is that going to be? At the marriage supper of the Lamb. There's yet a feast that we're coming to. Our Lord, who's preparing a place, is also preparing a feast. And, one of these days we're going to sit down at that table up yonder.

Now, hey, a man wrote a book—*88 Reasons Why Jesus was Coming Last Week*. Eighty-eight reasons—and He didn't come. Oh, how wrong it is to set dates! Eighty-eight reasons. But, I want to tell you, do you know something? There were 88 people who joined our church last Sunday. I think those were 88 reasons Jesus didn't come. I believe that our Lord is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). Well, one of these days, He will come. And, we're going to be caught up, swept up, to meet the Lord in the air, and we're going to sit down at that

table. Listen, don't you think negatively about God. When the Bible describes our salvation, the Bible doesn't describe our salvation as a funeral, but as a feast. *"Thou preparest a table before me"* (Psalm 23:5). And so, first of all, I want you to think of the fullness that we have in Christ.

II. The Freshness That We Have in Christ

But now, there's a second thing I want you to think about that ought to make you feel good about God: I want you to think about the freshness we have in Christ—the freshness we have in Christ. *"Thou anointest my head with oil"* (Psalm 23:5). Now, what was that for? My dear friend, that was to refresh—to refresh. Let me give you a wonderful scripture here; you might want to jot it down—Psalm 92, verse 10: *"I shall be anointed with fresh oil"* (Psalm 92:10). And, how about this one? Psalm 45 and verse 7: *"Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee"*—are you ready for this?—*"with the oil of gladness above thy fellows"* (Psalm 45:7). Fresh oil, the oil of gladness—God anoints us with that. He anoints our head with oil. What does that tell me? He's telling me that there ought to be a refreshing, a sweet aroma; there ought to be an oil of gladness about serving the Lord. Hey, don't feel sorry for me because I'm a Christian. I'm having a wonderful time, and I want to tell you something: His mercies are new every morning; every morning, He anoints me with fresh oil.

When I was preparing this message, I got to thinking about this. I was sitting at my desk, and I thought, "Is this true? Is there fresh oil every morning?" And, I had to put down my pen, and lift my hands, and praise the Lord. It is true—it is true. I love Him better today, I really believe, than ever before. I can say with my heart and my soul that it's still exciting to me. It is more exciting to me.

I was out yesterday walking and praying. I went out to Canaan, and walked, and prayed for about an hour and almost made a fool of myself just praising the Lord—I mean, just so happy in the Lord Jesus Christ. And, I thank God for the freshness in Christ. Other things get old, but friend, He just gets better. He gets sweeter. He gets more real. He satisfies every need. Yes, there's the fullness in Christ. He prepares a table. There's the freshness in Christ—that fragrance of Christ, that beauty of Christ, that reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you ever let the devil ever get you to thinking negatively about God.

III. The Freeness That We Have in Christ

And, I'll tell you, there's a third thing that this verse tells me that makes me feel good about God: not only the fullness in Christ and the freshness in Christ, but the freeness—the freeness that we have in Christ. *"My cup runneth over"* (Psalm 23:5). Oh, when He

gives, He gives so freely, so lavishly, so wondrously. God is a God of the open hand and the open heart. How free God gives! God is not stingy. God doesn't hold back. You see, in that passage on the Good Shepherd in John 10, verse 10, what did Jesus say? Jesus said, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it"*—how?—*"abundantly"* (John 10:10). Not only does He add years to our life; He adds life to our years, and it's an abundant life.

I was thinking about this—the abundance that He gives—and you know it's so true. When Jesus turned the water into wine in John chapter 2, do you know what the Bible scholars tell us? Do you know how much wine He made that day of the best wine? One hundred and twenty gallons. Now folks, they didn't need 120 gallons. That cup overflowed. Let me give you another example. When Jesus fed the 5,000 with a little boy's sack lunch, that was wonderful. But now, wait a minute—After He fed the 5,000, then there were 12 baskets full left over. Think about it. Our cup runs over.

Listen, He speaks of peace, but not just peace—*"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding"* (Philippians 4:7) He speaks of joy, but not just joy—*"joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (1 Peter 1:8). When the prodigal son came back, he said, *"Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it"* (Luke 15:23)—not just kill a chicken, the fatted calf; not just a calf, the best. He said, *"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him"* (Luke 15:22).

He's not talking here about necessity. He's talking about luxury. He's talking about out of His infinite goodness and fullness, He just keeps on giving, and giving, and giving. Have you ever thought about God that way—as the giving God, as the lavish God? Oh, *"freely [you] have received"* (Matthew 10:8)—the freeness that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. God doesn't measure His blessings drop by drop. Our cup runs over.

I heard about a little lady who went to the bank to cash a check. And, when she got her money, she stayed there, and she counted it all. Then, she counted it again. And then, she counted it a third time. And, the teller said, "What's the matter, lady? Isn't it all there?" She said, "It just is." Now friend, I want to tell you that God doesn't just throw in a few extra dollars. My cup just runs over. I mean, He doesn't measure His blessings. Oh, how we ought to be like that! You see, the Bible says, *"Freely ye have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8). You know what some folks I know would want to do? When God gives and when the cup runs over, they don't let it run over. Do you know what they want? A bigger cup—a bigger cup. You don't have to have a bigger cup, friend, if your cup is running over.

Remember the man in the Bible whose property brought forth so much? And, he said, *"I have no room where to bestow my fruits"* (Luke 12:17). He said, *"This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater"* (Luke 12:18)—"I don't want it to run over. I don't want it to bless any body else; I want it all for me—all for me." Oh, friend, no, no. Listen: *"Freely...have received, freely give"* (Matthew 10:8). Let the cup run over, and let

it be a blessing to somebody else.

I asked Jim to give me these words the other day. I remembered the song; I didn't remember quite the words. And, this is the way it goes:

*His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power [has] no boundary known unto man,
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.*

—ANNIE J. Flint

Conclusion

What do we have in the Lord Jesus? Oh, we have fullness in Christ: He prepares a table. What do we have in the Lord Jesus? We have freshness in Christ: He anoints our head. What do we have in the Lord Jesus? We have freeness in Christ: our cup runs over. Don't you let the devil get you to think negatively about God. I want you to hear Jesus saying to you, "I prepared a table for you. Come and dine—come and dine."

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. How good God is! *"For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11). I wonder how many of you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, how many would say, "Pastor, I know Him personally. He has forgiven my sins. I'm sure that I'm saved. And, I know if I died right now, I'd go to Heaven"? Would you slip up your hand? Hold it up for a moment. All right, take it down.

If you couldn't lift your hand—a number could not—to say, "I know that I'm saved," let me help you to know it right now. Let me help you, right now, to receive Christ. You may pray a prayer like this out of your heart: "Dear God"—that's right, just pray—"Dear God, I know You love me, and I know You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You, Jesus"—would you pray that prayer?—"I do trust You, Jesus, this moment, with all of my heart. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus"—pray it; pray it from your heart—"Save me, Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus. I trust You. I turn from my sin. I trust You to save me."

Did you ask Him? Then, pray this way: "thank You for saving me, Lord Jesus. I believe that You have, because I receive it by faith like a little child." And then, pray this one more thing: "Lord Jesus, help me never to be ashamed of You and give me the courage and the obedience to make it public that I have trusted You. In Your name I pray. Amen."

Finding the Will of God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 16, 1992

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 32:8

*"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which
thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."*

PSALMS 32:8

Outline

Introduction

- I. God's Guidance is Promised
 - A. Myth 1: God's Will Is a Roadmap
 - B. Myth 2: God Is a Celestial Killjoy
 - C. Myth 3: God Has a Will Only for People Like Missionaries
 - D. Myth 4: To Know God's Will You Must Have a Dramatic Experience
 - E. Myth 5: God's Will Is for the Young but Not the Old
 - F. Myth 6: God's Will Is Like an Easter Egg Hunt
- II. God's Guidance Is Provisional
 - A. There Must Be Willingness
 - B. There Must Be Meekness
 - C. There Must Be Yieldedness
- III. God's Guidance Is Practical
 - A. Through the Word of God
 - B. Through the Providences of God
 - C. Through the Holy Spirit
 - D. Through the People of God
 - E. Through Godly Wisdom
 - F. Through Miracles

Conclusion

Introduction

For our Bible study tonight, would you take your Bibles and find Psalm 32, the book of Psalms, Psalm 32. I want to give you in just a moment a wonderful promise. But I want you to imagine yourself standing face-to-face with Jesus Christ. I mean, suppose Jesus Christ were to step out of heaven? Now we know He's here in the Holy Spirit. We know that. But suppose Jesus Christ were to step right out of heaven and come and stand in front of you just as a man standing right there face-to-face with you? First of all, of course, you'd fall on your face just to worship Him. Then you would, ah, you would

bathe His feet with your tears, to see the Savior face-to-face. But then, suppose He were to say to you, “I will be here with you for five minutes. And you can ask Me any question you want to ask me.” What would you ask Him? You have five minutes. Any question. What would you ask Him?

I think I know what you would say. Now maybe you don’t know, but I think I know what you would say. I think you would ask Him the same question that the apostle Paul asked Him. “Lord, what would You have me to do?” I think that’s what you’d ask Him. “Lord, what is Your will for my life?” Did you know that that is the question, I suppose, that is more asked in Bible conference, more asked of preachers, or anything else. How can I know the will of God?

When the apostle Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he asked the two greatest questions that could ever be asked. Question number one: “Who are You, Lord?” Two question number two: “Lord, what would You have me to do?” You can’t ask two greater questions than that. He spent the rest of his life discovering the answer to those two questions – exactly who Jesus Christ is and the will of God for his life.

Now, with that in mind, I want you to look in Psalm chapter 32 and verse 8 at a wonderful, wonderful promise. God says this: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye.”

I want to talk to you tonight about finding the will of God. And, in a very real sense, you don’t find it; it finds you. But I’m going to use that as a title, “Finding the Will of God,” how to know the will of God.

Now you will not know it in and of yourself, for the Bible says in Jeremiah chapter 10 and verse 23: “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” You just don’t have what it takes. I don’t care how good you are, how godly you are, how smart you are, you don’t have what it takes to know the will of God in and of yourself. And yet, this verse of Scripture says, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”

Now let me just look at this verse of Scripture with you and give you several wonderful thoughts tonight.

I. God’s Guidance is Promised

First of all, we’ve already said it, but I want to reiterate it with some other Scriptures, that God has promised guidance for you. God has promised to guide you. Now let me give you some verses.

One that we often quote is Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” That’s Ephesians 2:8-9. But what about verse 10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before

ordained that we should walk in them.” That means God has a plan for our life. God has things He wants us to do. He has before ordained that we should walk in these ways.

Or let me put this verse before you, Psalm 37 and verse 23: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” That means that God wants to direct your steps day-by-day.

And then, what about this verse: Isaiah 58 and verse 11: “The LORD shall guide thee continually...” I love that. There’s no ifs, ands, and buts about that. “The LORD shall guide thee continually...” Beyond the shadow of any doubt or peradventure, God promises guidance.

And I suppose there’s one that all of us have written down somewhere, somehow have keyed in on. It’s Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 6: “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He (what?), He shall direct thy paths.” Now, folks, those are clear promises. We, as God’s children, know that God has a plan for our lives and He wants us to fit into it. Actually, God’s will is three-fold. There’s God’s sovereign will. That is, the way that God, who runs the mighty universe, and nothing can stop it, nothing can hinder it, and God’s sovereign will will be done. Often, God’s sovereign will is mysterious. Many times we don’t know, we don’t understand what God is sovereignly doing, and we just have to let God be God in that realm. A good verse that deals with that is Deuteronomy chapter 29 and verse 29: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us.” Now there are two categories of things: secret things. They just belong to God. Ha, you’ll never pry into them. They belong to God. But the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law. That is, there are certain things that God just sovereignly....we, we couldn’t understand them if, if He were to tell them. I mean, ah, it would do and me, any good to explain them to us, because He says, “My ways are not your ways, my thoughts are not your thoughts. As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways above your ways.”

Now let me ask you a question. How high is the heaven? You can’t answer that, can you? How far up is up? You can’t answer that, can you? And, my dear friend, God’s ways are unfathomable to you because He’s God. Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Who hath been His counselor? That’s what Paul asked.

So there’s the sovereign will of God, the way God runs His mighty universe. That you will never know, you will never understand because He is God and you’re not.

But, my dear friend, there’s also God’s general will. Now God’s specific will we’re going to get to in a moment. But God has a general will for all of us. I mean, God has a certain moral plan in the Bible. It’s not God’s will that you should steal or kill. It’s not God’s will that you should be full of pride or greedy. It’s not God’s will that you should marry an unbeliever. It’s not God’s will that you should take His name in vain.

You just know God's will by reading the Word of God. There are just certain things that are the will of God. That's just the general will of God. You don't ever have the pray about the things that God has, has just revealed. It's, it's a standard. You know it's the will of God. "This is the will of God, your sanctification. The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." All of those things just, that's the will of God. You find it. There's the sovereign will of God. There is the general will of God. But, my dear friend, there is also a specific will of God. Now we're tightening the focus a little bit more. That God has a plan for you and He has a plan for me. And the plan for me is not the plan for you. And the plan for you is not necessarily the plan for me.

Now let me illustrate what I mean by God's, ah, special will. Remember that verse that says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and he delighteth in his way?" Now I took certain steps today, and you took certain steps. My steps were not your steps, and your steps were not my steps. But if we were walking in the Spirit, all of our steps were ordered by the LORD, though different. That's God's special will. That's God specific will for you and me.

Maybe I can illustrate it this way: It was God's sovereign will that I become a Christian. I mean, before God ever swung this world into space, you may not be able to understand it. I don't understand it. But God sovereignly chose us. We're chosen in Christ. He knew we would be saved. He sovereignly planned it. He sent His Son. He saved us. That's God's sovereign will. Thank God for it. I don't understand it. I just enjoy it. Now, it was for me. It's God's sovereign will I be saved.

Now, it was God's general will that me, as a saved person, that I, as a saved person, would marry a Christian, because He said in His Word I'm not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. So I knew that when I got married I had to marry a Christian. I mean, that, that's God's general will. Hey, but it was God's special will for me that I married Joyce. That's God's special will for me, that God gave me that one incredible woman, and that's, that, and I really believe He gave her to me. I really honestly believe that, and I thank God for it.

Now, when I would take Joyce home after a date, we'd stand there on the front porch and, you know, I had to fight her off. But she would, every now and then, ah, (laughter) show me a token of affection. And, and then, I'd walk home that high off the sidewalk, just praying, "O God, let me marry that woman. Dear God, please, Lord, let, let her, let her be my wife. Please, God, please." And God heard my prayer. Because I really believe I was praying in the will of God and that was God's, ah, special will for me.

Now, my dear friend, God has His sovereign will. God has His general will. But then, the, God has that very special will where, where the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD. Now that may impress you or it may not impress you. You may say, "Well,

sure He does,” or you may say, “Why would God be interested in me, just a, like a fleck of spray in an ocean of existence? Our tiny, little planet here, and I’m one of 5 ½ billion people here on this planet. Why would God be interested in me?” But, my dear friend, He is. You are not an accident. You, my dear friend, are an incident. And may I say this? That God doesn’t love us all. God loves us each. I mean, He loves each one of you. He loves you like there were no, there was no one else. I mean, you are the total object of His love. Now He loves everybody else the same way. But if there, if everybody else were not here, He would love you like, ah, the same way and, and more people don’t keep Him from loving you. He, He loves you. He doesn’t deal with you in mass. He has as many plans as He has people. Ah, ah, He, He has as many methods as He has men.

Now there are about 6 myths concerning the will of God, and these are common myths. And I want to try to kill them tonight.

A. **Myth 1: God’s Will Is a Roadmap**

Number one is that God is going to give you, when He shows you His will, that He’s going to give you a roadmap for your life. He’s not going to do that. He says, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD...” Ah, God does not, God does not just unroll the scroll and say, “Now here’s where you are here. Here’s where you’re going to be 10 years from now. Here’s where you’re going to be 15 years from here, now. And here’s, here’s what I want you to do. And here’s how you’re going to die.” God doesn’t show you that. And I’m grateful that He doesn’t. How boring it would be, or how terrifying it would be to know what is in the future. God’s will for you is not a roadmap; it is a relationship. When God led the children of Israel through the wilderness, how did He lead them? He led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And all they had to do was just simply keep that pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire in sight. All you have to do is be conscious of the presence of God in your life. That’s all. It is a relationship.

B. **Myth 2: God Is a Celestial Killjoy**

Now there’s another myth. Some, ah, the second myth is that God is somehow a celestial killjoy. That is, that, ah, it would be better for you if you didn’t do the will of God, but the will of God is something you, “surrender do it.” People talk about, “Well, I surrendered to preach.” Well, friend, I didn’t surrender to preach. Ha, ha. I am glad God called me to preach. I mean, what.....”Oh, I gotta be a preacher.” Oh no. Listen. The will of God is not something that you have to do; it’s something you get to do. It’s something God wants for you what you’d want for yourself if you had enough sense to want it. God is a loving Father. The Bible says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, He’ll give you the desire of your heart.” Now that doesn’t mean that you delight yourself in the Lord, that you can

have whatever you want, because your wants are determined by your desires. And when a man desires in the Lord, His desires, ah, change. It's interesting, isn't it? But, you see, God is not a cosmic killjoy.

C. Myth 3: God Has a Will Only for People Like Missionaries

Here's a third myth: That, ah, that God only has a will for certain categories of, of people like missionaries. Oh yeah, God has a will for missionaries. Or pastors, or sometimes, even associate pastors; that God has a, has a, has a special plan for these kinds of people. There are certain categories of people, but not for the average man, not for the man in the pew, not for the man on the street. But you listen to me, dear friend. God has a plan for pastors, and God has a plan for plumbers. God has a plan for missionaries, and God has a plan for secretaries. And God has a plan for you!

D. Myth 4: To Know God's Will You Must Have a Dramatic Experience

Here's another myth: That in, in order to know the will of God and find the will of God, you've got to have some great, dramatic experience. You've got to be like the apostle Paul, to whom I alluded a few moments ago, who had a Damascus Road experience. That's not so. My dear friend, God generally does not speak in great, dramatic ways.

We remember the little play that we had here a couple of Wednesday nights ago. It's taken from 1st Kings chapter 19, verses 11 and 12. "And He said, Go forth, and stand up on the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still, small voice." That's God, my dear friend. Don't get the idea that, ah, you have to be an earthquaker. It would be better for you to be just a Quaker, just, just listening to God, just listening to God.

E. Myth 5: God's Will Is for the Young but Not the Old

Here's another myth: That God shows His will for the young, but not for the old. That is, when you're young, when you're in high school, when you're in college, or when you're, ah, just getting out and starting in life that, therefore, you must find the will of God for your life. But if you're, you know, you're in your 40s, 50s, 60s, well, it's all settled. It's all over. I'm past that stage in life where I have to seek the will of God. Oh no! Oh no! God has a plan for you every day, every moment and that never ends. All of your life. Maybe you missed, maybe God did call you to be a missionary and you missed it. Maybe God did call you to be a pastor and you refused. Maybe God did instruct you and you disobeyed. But let me give you a wonderful verse, Joel chapter 2, verse 25: "I will restore to you the years that the locusts hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you." God said, "You

disobeyed Me, and I sent all of these creatures to devour the good out of your life. But you get right with Me; I'll restore, I'll restore those years." And there's nobody here who's past wanting to know, should be, the will of God.

F. **Myth 6: God's Will Is Like an Easter Egg Hunt**

Here's another myth: And that is, that God hides His will and you have to find it. That's a myth. The will of God is not an Easter egg hunt. As a matter of fact, the will of God finds you. When you get in a position to do the will of God and you're yielded to the will of God, my dear friend, that is the will of God.

Psalm 32 and verse 8, Listen: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that, which thou shalt go." He doesn't say, "I'm going to hide it from you." He says just the opposite. He says, "...I will guide thee with mine eye." So, so, guidance, direction is promised.

II. **God's Guidance Is Provisional**

The second thing. Not only is it promised; it, my dear friend, is provisional. Not all people find it even though it is promised. And I think one of the key reasons is this little phrase, "I will guide thee with mine eye." Do you know what that means? That means that you and God have to have a special relationship.

Have you ever seen anybody guided with somebody's eye? What does it mean to guide with your eye? When I was a younger preacher, my children used to come to church and they.... Momma would generally have them sitting on the front row. And I know the deacons' kids never do it, but every now and then the preacher's kids act up. And, you know, little kids, they squirm or whatever. And there'd be times when I'd be preaching and I'd see one of mine doing something that's wrong. Now most of the people in the congregation wouldn't know it, but they would know what was happening. When I'd be preaching along, and I'd catch the eye of that boy, and I'd look at him, still be talking, but he knew that that meant straighten up or else it's going to be mighty rough right after church. That's just guiding with your eye. I mean, you can communicate that way. As a matter of fact, Joyce frequently guides me with her eye (laughter). All, all you married people know what, you know, you know that? You're sitting there at the dinner table and a conversation comes up. And she looks at you and you change the subject (laughter). I mean, you know to change the subject. That, that, that, ah, you're on the wrong track or whatever. People who are in love can do that. People who are tuned in can do that. People who are sensitive can do that. And that's what God is saying. God is saying there has to be a relationship. There's a provision that you're close enough to Me that I can guide you with My eye.

A. **There Must Be Willingness**

Let me give you some qualities, ah, that will help God to guide you with His eye. The very first is, is willingness. You have to be willing to be guided. You know, one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible? John 7:17. Jesus makes a phenomenal promise. Jesus says, “If any man wills to do the will of God, he shall know the doctrine.” He will know the teaching. “If any man wills to do, if any man wills to do His will (that’s literally what it says in the King James), he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. If any man wills to do the will of God....”

Hey, I want to ask you a question. Do you desire, more than anything else, the will of God? See, that’s the big question. God can’t guide you with His eye. He, He’s not going.....you see, the only people who can be guided with an eye are people who are willing. He doesn’t force. He’s never forced me to do anything.

Now a lot of times we say we’re willing to do the will of God, but we’re really not.

I read a story years ago about a vagabond who just went down through the countryside, wandering through the countryside. He said, “I just go wherever I want to go.” And someone said, “That’s incredible.” He said, “Yeah, I’m just free.” Said, “I’m just willing to go anywhere, do anything.” And they said, “Well, what do you do when you come to the fork in the road? How do you decide whether to go right or left?” “Oh,” he said, “that’s simple.” He said, “I just pick up a stick and throw it up in the air. And whichever way it’s pointing when it lands,” he says, “that’s the way I go.” He said, “Sometimes I have to throw it up as many as six times to make it land right.”

Now there are a lot of us who are very much like that. We say, “Oh, I’m just willing to do the will of God, whatever it is, whatever it is.” But God shows us something, and we keep coming back and coming back and coming back until finally we convince ourselves that it is God’s will for us to do what we always wanted to do in the first place. And, ah, we’re really not following the will of God. We think we are. We say we are. But we’re, we’re deluded.

B. **There Must Be Meekness**

Are you truly, truly, truly, I mean, honest injun, willing to do God’s will? Are you? You see, if you’re willing, then there’s something else that comes right on the heels of being willing so God can guide you with His eye. And that is meekness. Do you know what meekness is? The word meekness means “you’re teachable.” Let me give you a wonderful verse, Psalm 25 and verse 9: “The meek will he guide in judgment...” Isn’t that great? “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.” You see, if you’re willing, truly willing, and truly meek, then God can show you. Most of us are unwilling and somewhat arrogant. You see, a meek person is a teachable person. Are you teachable? Many times, a boy about 14 years of age will drop out of school. And you know why? He says, “They can’t teach me any more.” He’s probably

right, probably right, because he doesn't want to be taught. But, but, but were he meek, he could learn how much he does not know.

C. **There Must Be Yieldedness**

Now here's a third thing, and they follow 1, 2, 3: Willingness, meekness, and then yieldedness. You see, if you're truly meek, you'll learn. And when you learn, you will truly obey. That's the reason why Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 is one of the key verses in all of this, being guided by the eye of God. Listen to it. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." That means it just makes sense. It just makes sense because of what Jesus has done for you. "And be not conformed to this world (that is, squeezed in by this world's mold), but be ye transformed..." The Greek work is literally, ah, metamorphosed, like a, a caterpillar goes through a metamorphosis where the inner nature comes to the surface. "...be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God." Now what this says is you just present yourself to God. You just present yourself to God. You're yielded. You say, "Here I am. I'm willing. I'm meek. And I'm yielded." You say, "How can I know whether I'm yielded or not?" Well, would you, would you just, would you just sign the contract at the bottom and hand it to God and tell Him to fill it in? Would you?

I mean, if somebody comes to you and says, "Will you do something for me?" you say, "Well, tell me what it is." They say, "No, I won't tell you. Just will you do it?" You say, "No, tell me first." "No, I, I don't want to. Just tell me you'll do it." Well, friend, I want to tell you one thing. If you didn't know that person, love them, and trust them, you wouldn't say yes, isn't that right? Now I just might do that if Joyce told me. Say, "Don't ask me why. Just tell me you'll do it." I would say, "She loves me enough that she would not take advantage of me, and I can trust her," and I'd probably, fearfully say, "Yes, (laughter) I'll do it. I'll do it."

Now God wants to know, do you love Me enough, do you trust Me enough just to say yes before you even know the answer, the question? I mean, would you sign your name at the bottom? You say, "Well, I, I, I have to know what it is." All right, I'll tell you what it is. It's good, perfect, and, and acceptable (Romans 12:1-2). It's good, perfect, and acceptable. You prove what is that good, ex, perfect, and acceptable will of God.

Now, you see, there is a provision, but you have to be close enough to God. You have to be yielded enough to God that God can guide you with His eye. God will never shove you. God will never coerce you. God will never drag you. God will never force you. God will not bribe you. But He'll guide you with His eye. He'll guide you with His eye.

III. God's Guidance Is Practical

All right, now look. It's promised. It's provisional. But it's also very practical, very practical. Look again at, at the verse. He says, "I will instruct you and I'll teach you. I will instruct you and I will teach you." Never quickly, and we're running out of time. But let me give you six ways that God will instruct you and teach you His will, six ways.

A. Through the Word of God

First of all, obviously, the Word of God. Obviously! And when I say God's going to guide you with the Word of God, I don't mean the lucky dip. You just let it fall open and put your finger on a verse. That's an insult to God to use the Bible that way. Now God may sometimes show you a verse when you open the Bible that way, but that's not the normal way, and that's certainly, ah, very presumptuous of you to try to get God to guide you that way. But God does guide through the Bible. One verse out of many that I'll teach, ah, give you, Psalm 119, verse 105: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." That's one way He guides you. You've got a lamp. You've got a light. So, ah, ah, there are certain things you just know because of the Word of God. And, my dear friend, when God reveals something in His Word, never insult God by asking you to, asking Him to give guidance in that matter that He has clearly shown you in His Word. Never! Just simply obey Him. He's already commanded it. You don't have to say, 'Now, God, is this right for me?' That's arrogance. It's unbelief. It's an insult to the Almighty. All right, the Word of God is one way He'll guide you.

B. Through the Providences of God

Number two: The providences of God. God guides by providence. Now, what I mean by providence is that God opens and closes doors of opportunity. You find yourself in certain situations.

First Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 9. The apostle Paul says, "For a great door and effectual is open unto me, and there are many adversaries." You know, the will of God doesn't mean it's going to be all honey and no bees. Paul says, "There's a great door open, ah, but there are a lot of people who don't want me to go through it." One great man said, "The door to the room of opportunity swings on the hinges of opposition." But God open doors. And we need to pray that God will open doors. Colossians 4, verse 3: "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance..." God opens doors. In the book of the Revelation, Jesus is, is described as "He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth."

I'm the Pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. Why? There was an open door. There was an open door. Now, it wasn't the only open door, but it was an open door. And so, that's one of the ways I knew it was God's will. You asked me to come. You asked me to be the pastor of this church.

C. **Through the Holy Spirit**

Here's the third way God guides: Not, not only, ah, does God guide through His Word and, and through His providences, but He guides us mysteriously, mystically by the Holy Spirit. Now there are some people today who try and explain this away, and I think they're dead wrong on this. They're saying that there's no such thing as the mystical guiding, guidance of the Holy Spirit. But let me give you some verses.

Ah, Romans chapter 8 and verse 14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Now whatever means the Spirit of God may use, I don't care, you're still, it's the Spirit of God who's doing the leading.

Or put this one down, Galatians chapter 5, verse 18: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Now let me say this about the Holy Spirit. Remember, He's that still, small voice. He guides, but He does not shove. He whispers; He does not shout. And the Holy Spirit speaking is not your emotion. The Holy Spirit deals with your spirit. And your, your, your emotions may key on your human spirit and the voice of the Holy Spirit, but your emotions are not the same. And you need to learn the difference between emotion and the voice of the Spirit. You say, "How do I know the voice of the Spirit?" Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice. They know Me." You walk with God. You'll know when God is speaking.

D. **Through the People of God**

And then, the fourth way that God guides: Not only the Holy Spirit, ah, or the Spirit of God. I'm talking about the Word of God, the providences of God, the Spirit of God. The people of God. You'll find the will of God much easier, much better in the context of other Christians. When God is speaking to you about something, He's probably confirming it to someone else. The mouth of two or more witnesses the thing shall be established, the Bible says.

In Proverbs chapter 24 and verse 6, the Bible says, "For by wise counsel thou shalt make war, and in multitude of counselors there is safety." One of the, one of the great blessings of this church is a combination of pastoral leadership and wise counsel. We have some godly people who serve on our committees. And many times, they'll say, "Now, pastor, what do you think we ought to do? What do you want us to do, pastor?" I say, "I really don't know. Let's talk. Let's pray. Let's listen." And we talk, and we talk, and we pray, and we talk, and we pray, and we talk. And after a while, the thing just congeals. Say, "Yes, that's what God wants us to do."

In Acts chapter 15, the early church had a problem. And so, they came together, and in one of the greatest statements in all of the Bible is this: And it says, "And it seemed good to us and to the Holy Ghost." It was like they were, they're sitting around a conference table and everybody nod their head, and the Holy Spirit says, "Yep, that's right. Amen. That's right." "It seemed, it, it seemed good to us and to the Holy Ghost." I

like that. And I have seen that happen. And you, you people who've served on committees here at Bellevue. You've seen it happen so many times, as we faced things and problems and heartaches and opportunities, and in, in, in a multitude of, of counselors. I thank God for the counselors in my life. But when you go to a counselor, you make certain that he is mature, ah, walking in the Spirit. And remember that the Holy Spirit is the final counselor. But God does use the people of God.

E. Through Godly Wisdom

Now, next of all, there's the wisdom of God, the wisdom of God. God gives supernatural wisdom. Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 and 16: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." And, of course, the classic passage in James, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. Only let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like the wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. A double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways. Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord." But ask God for wisdom, and God gives wisdom.

Now, what is wisdom? Sanctified sense. Wisdom is not getting wet around the lashes and warm around the heart. It's not getting goose bumps and liver shivers. What is wisdom? Wisdom is seeing life from God's point of view. Dr. J. I. Packer said this about wisdom and it's a classic. Listen to it. "Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it." That's a good statement. I'll give it again. "Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal together with the surest means of attaining it." God gives wisdom. And He will give wisdom. Pray for wisdom. Ask God for wisdom.

F. Through Miracles

And the sixth way, and I'm finished, the sixth way is through miracle. God does guide by miracle. And I would be, ah, I would be remiss if I did not tell you that God guides by miracle. God can guide in a dream.

You read the Bible. He guided people in dreams. God can speak in an audible voice. God can speak out of heaven and saying, ah, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him." God can give a vision. God gave, ah, Simon Peter a vision and told him to go visit Cornelius. Ah, God, ah, can use a prophet to speak a prophecy. God can work a miracle. And, my dear friend, may I tell you that God does not normally do that. He does not normally do that. These are not normal ways. And as you study the book of Acts, only a handful of times did God work that way. It's not to say He cannot, but if you depend upon these things, I believe that you're going to be greatly disappointed.

And, you see, we have the, we have the Word of God today. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. Many things that were given to the early church are not needed with completion of the Word of God. I do thank God for signs, and I believe there are times where God gives signs.

Ah, when I came up here, talked with your Pulpit Committee twenty years ago, I was a one perplexed, bewildered man because I thought I was absolutely where I was supposed to be at Merritt Island, Florida. As a matter of fact, I'd just been in, interviewed by the newspaper. And the man said to me, ah, "How long do you expect to stay at Merritt Island?" He, I said, "I expect to go to heaven from Merritt Island." That was in the newspaper the week before your Pulpit Committee talked to me. Absolutely! A full-page Sunday supplement came out. The title of the article, "Reverend Rogers and His Island in the Sun." That was the title of this Sunday supplement. And I told the man in that, in that article, "I expect to go to heaven from Merritt Island."

Came up here and this Pulpit Committee started fooling with me (laughter). And, ah, really, it was disconcerting because I thought, you know, I was really where I was supposed to be. And I went home. I, I may have told you this story before. But I went home and my desk...I'd been on vacation. And my desk was laden with papers about that thick and about that wide, mail that had come while I was gone. And right on the very top, on the very top was a magazine. I've never subscribed to that magazine. It was some sort of a, of a secular magazine. And it fell open. First thing I picked up. Centerfold. And in big letters it said, "Assignment: Memphis." Ha, I, I almost fell off the chair (laughter). I mean, I thought, *Dear God is this You or the devil?* I mean, I really, I mean, I, I, I would have been scared to death, though, to make a decision on such a thing, scared to death. How did I know the devil didn't put that magazine right there? Friend, listen. There's something far better than visions and signs and ecstasies and feelings. God does guide His people.

Conclusion

Now I'm finished. Let me just tell you this now. The will of God is for your welfare, as well as for His glory. The best thing that could happen to you, to your mate, your children, and your country would be for you to get in the will of God and stay there. Secondly, never be afraid of the will of God. The will of God will never lead you where the power of God will not enable you and the grace of God will not keep you. Okay? Number three: You are free to choose or not to choose the will of God. You're free, absolutely free to choose it or not to choose it. But you are not free to choose the consequences of not obeying the will of God. You're free to step out of a ten-story building without a parachute or anything else. But after that, your choices are over. I mean, you go down. You are free to do the will of God or not to do it, but you're not free

to choose the consequences of disobeying the will of God. Or, for that matter, even obeying the will of God. That's in God's hands. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, I pray tonight that You would help me as a pastor, as a man of God, to be so close to You, Lord, that You can guide me with Your eye and instruct me in the way that I should go. Lord, I pray that You'd help us all to know, young or old, that You have a plan for us. Help us to know it and do it, that You might be blessed and that we might be blessed. In Your holy name I pray, amen.

Knowing God's Will

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 1, 1986

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 32:8–9

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

PSALMS 32:8

Outline

Introduction

I. The Will Principle

II. The Word Principle

III. The Wisdom Principle

A. God Will Speak to You

1. If an Experience is Contrary to Scripture, Then You Know It is Wrong

2. If It is a Compulsion, Then It is Probably Not God

B. God Will Use Your Mind

IV. The Walk Principle

Conclusion

Introduction

Our subject tonight is "Knowing God's Will." I want you to take God's precious Word and turn, if you will, with me, to Psalm 32. And, here's a promise from the Word of God—Psalm 32:8: God promises, *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee"* (Psalm 32:8–9). *"I will guide thee"* (Psalm 32:8), God says. *"I will...teach thee"*—*"I will instruct thee"* (Psalm 32:8). It cannot be clearer: God has a plan for every man's life and for every woman's life.

I suppose the question that is asked more than any other in Bible discussions with college students and others, when you get right down to the bottom line, is this: "How can I know the will of God for my life?" because man is a clever creature, and he's lost his way in the darkness. And, it's so sad to see so many of them young people floundering around without a sense of direction. Somebody has said that "half of our problems come from wanting our own way." And now, we need to find the will of God—the way of God for our lives.

Over and over again, our dear God has promised to guide us. Another wonderful scripture would be found in Isaiah 58:11: *“And the LORD shall guide thee continually.”* And then, again, in Proverbs 3:6: *“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”* And so, we have the Father above us, controlling all things. We have our dear Lord Jesus Christ beside us, directing our footsteps. We have the Holy Spirit of God within us, impressing our hearts and showing us the way to go. And so, listen to me, my dear friends, whoever you are and wherever you are—in this auditorium, or by the radio, or listening later by tape—God has a specific plan for your life—not just for the minister of music, not just for the missionary we prayed tonight, not just for the pastor, but He has a specific plan for all people. It is as true for the plumber as it is for the preacher. And, as a matter of fact, if God called you to be a plumber, then you’d be out of the will of God if you tried to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for everyone’s life, and the Bible says in Ephesians 2:10: *“we”—that is, “His children”—“are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* So, God has a plan. He has foreordained that plan for us. The Bible teaches that the very hairs of our head are numbered (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7). God knows about us as individuals. God never deals with people in mass, as such; He deals with people as individuals. And, God has as many methods as He has men. God has a particular, specific plan for your life, and it is your duty and your delight to find, to follow, and to finish God’s plan for your life. So, may I be bold enough to give you four ways to know the will of God for your life?

I. The Will Principle

The first principle I want to give you is the principle of your will, or let’s call it “the will principle.” The very first thing that you should know—the very first thing that you should do, rather—if you want to know the will of God is to surrender your will to His will, no matter what it is. Now, let me give you a verse that backs that up. And, you may jot these down and turn to them if you’re fast enough. But, I’m going to use a lot of scripture, so you’re going to have to hustle if you turn the pages. But, Romans 12:1–2—most of us know that this verse is a key verse, a primary verse, in discovering the will of God. It’s almost God’s prayer to man; it’s almost as though God is praying to us. And, God is saying to the Apostle Paul, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren”—now, we, many times, beseech God, but God is beseeching us through Paul—“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1–2). Do you want to know the will of God? Don’t surrender to a plan; surrender to a person—to God.

I hear people say, “Oh, I surrender to the ministry.” I think, “What a shame! They didn’t surrender to Jesus.” Just surrender to a person. *God’s will for your life is not a roadmap; it is a relationship.* You do not find the will of God; primarily, the will of God finds you, as you obey the Lord, as you surrender to the Lord, and as you commit your way to the Lord. Now, Jesus said of Himself, “*I am the way*” (John 14:6). There is no way to the way; He is the way. I mean, you just come to Jesus, and you just surrender to Jesus. You just sign a blank check, and you say to the Lord, “Lord, anywhere, any time, any cost.” Have you ever done that? “Lord, anywhere, any time, any cost.”

I want to ask you a very serious question: What right does any body have to expect to know the will of God who doesn’t do at least that much? Huh? What right does any body have to expect to know the will of God who has not presented his body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, totally committed to the Lord? “Anywhere, any time, any cost, I commit my life to You.” You sign a blank check, and let God’s will fill it in. “Well,” you say, “oh my goodness, Pastor, if I were to do that—no telling what would happen to me. They’d burn me at the stake. I don’t know what’s going to happen to me if I just said, ‘Lord, You can do anything.’” Do you think God is that cruel? I mean, do you think that God is just waiting for you so He can say, “Haha, boy, now I’ve got him”?

Suppose your child comes to you and says, “Dad, I’ve been thinking about it. Dad, you’re so wise, and you’re so loving, and you’re so kind, and you’re so good. I’ve just decided that from now on, I’m going to obey you.” Now, don’t hold your breath ’till he does that, but now, just suppose he does that: “Dad, from now on, I’ve just decided that whatever I think you want from life, that’s what I want to do—whatever you and mom say.” Now, what would ya’ll do? Meet that night for a cup of coffee and say, “Did you hear what he said? Boy, he’ll be sorry he ever said that! Now, what are the mean, terrible things we can do to him?” That’s the way—that’s the way—some people think of God. They think, “You know, if I were just to say, ‘Lord, I’ll do anything, anywhere, any cost,’” that God would sit up all night thinking how to make you squirm like a worm in hot ashes to make you sorry that you’d ever said such a thing. Oh, my friend, listen—what a liability on the character of God!

This Bible says you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, and you prove what is that good and acceptable will of God (Romans 12:1–2). Do you know what you’ll prove? You will prove that God’s will is best. Friend, I’ve said it before; I’ll say it again: *God wants for you what you’d want for yourself if you had enough sense to want it.* Don’t be afraid of the will of God. Don’t be afraid of God. “*Perfect love [casts] out fear*” (1 John 4:18)—not your perfect love for God, but God’s perfect love for you. The Bible says, “*Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart*” (Psalm 37:4). And, don’t ever get the idea that what you and what God wants are going to be different things. If you’ll surrender to Him, then it’ll be the same thing. You will get

the desire of your heart. Jesus said, *“My [mission] is to do the will of him that sent me”* (John 4:34)—“that is my bread and butter; that’s what I desire to do—is the will of Him.” What a liability on the character of God that says, “If you surrender to God, then you’re going to be miserable”! “Well,” you say, “I might end up in the heart of Africa.” Well, if you do, then you’ll be happier there than you would be in any place on the face of this earth, if you are following the will of God.

I want to tell you, dear friend, that you, first of all, must commit your life to Him whose will it is and present your bodies a living sacrifice to Him. Psalm 37:4 says, *“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”* Have you done that? Have you said, “Here I am. Here, Lord, I give myself away; ’tis all that I can do”? If you’ve done that, then you’re ready to move to step two. If you haven’t done that, then you can’t move to step two. The first principle is “the will principle.” You surrender your will ahead of time—not “Lord, You show me, and I’ll let You know,” but “Lord, my mind is made up.”

II. The Word Principle

The second principle is “the Word principle”—“the Word principle.” You begin to saturate your life with the Word of God. Listen to what the psalmist said in Psalm 119:105: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”* You get in the Word of God, and you’re going to find out that God will begin to direct your life right out of the Bible. Now, that doesn’t mean that you’re going to use the Bible as a talisman. I mean, you’re not going to find some lucky dip. You’re not going to find something in here that’s going to say, “You go here, or you go there.” That’s not the way the Bible works, primarily. The Bible is not a book to be used that way. The Bible is not a book of minute laws; it is a book of great principles. And, what you do—you just simply find those principles in the will of God.

You see, so much of the will of God for your life is already settled. For example, the Bible says that it’s God’s will that you *“abstain from fornication”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Now, a man might come and say, “Pastor, I’m married to this woman, but there’s another woman over here that I’m interested in. Would you pray with me that I might know God’s will about the matter?” No, I won’t pray with you about that. I’ll pray with you about something else: I’ll pray with you about beginning to obey the will of God that He’s already shown you. It’s not God’s will *“that any should perish”* (2 Peter 3:9), so we know that God will save any body who wants to be saved. And, therefore, we know that it’s God’s will that we be soul winners. *“This is the will of God, even your sanctification”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). There is so much of the will of God that’s just revealed in the Word of God. You get into the Word of God, and you are going to find that you’re going to begin to live by the great principles of the Word of God. So much of God’s will is already

revealed in the Word of God—marvelous, great principles. And so, as you begin to let God’s Word flow through you, you will begin to think God’s thoughts after Him, for the Bible is the Word of God.

All right. The first principle is “the will principle.” The second principle is “the Word principle.”

III. The Wisdom Principle

The third principle is “the wisdom principle.” Now, as you surrender your will and as you get in the Word, then you’re going to find that God is going to begin to give you wisdom. And, as you pray and ask God for wisdom... Let me give you some scripture and show you how God gives wisdom. For example, let’s look in Acts 1:24. Just jot this down; I’m going to give you a lot of these here, in just a moment. The early disciples were wanting to know who should take the place of Judas, who fell; they wanted an apostle to take Judas’s place. *“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen”* (Acts 1:24). That is, “Lord, give us insight. Help us to know. Just show us—show us.” But, did they have a right to pray that way? Of course. James says in James 1:5: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”* No ifs, ands, or buts about it—*“it shall be given him”* (James 1:5). And, God will give you wisdom.

A. God Will Speak to You

Now, wisdom is a two-way street: not only do you ask for it, but you also listen for it. When you talk to God, if you expect God to give you wisdom, then you need to listen to God. God is going to speak to your innermost thoughts. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice”* (John 10:27). Do you ever hear Jesus speaking to you? “Oh,” you say, “that sounds mystical.” It really is. And, by the way, that’s one of the reasons for fasting—so that you can sharpen the ability of the spiritual ear to hear.

Let me give you some other scriptures. Acts 8:29—here’s the story of Philip. He’s out in the desert. Now, he doesn’t have a Bible with him; he may have a Bible with him, but the Bible doesn’t say this. The Bible says, *“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot”* (Acts 8:29). Now, that’s just the Holy Spirit of God speaking to this man. God’s Spirit said, “Philip, I want you to go get into that chariot with that man.” Now, you remember the story—that Philip went over there and led that Ethiopian to Jesus, and that Ethiopian was the one. So, tradition tells us that opened all North Africa to the gospel. I’m so glad that Philip could hear God speak. God gave him the wisdom to go and listen.

Let me give you another scripture—these are taken from the Book of Acts—Acts

13:2. Now, they are in a prayer meeting; the Bible says, *“As they ministered to the Lord...”* (Acts 13:2). And, by the way, do you know that we need to minister to the Lord? Do you know what I think every church service ought to be? I think, first of all, we ought to minister to the Lord. Then, we ought to minister to the saved. Then, we ought to minister to the lost. I think the first part of the service ought to just be ministering to the Lord, just praising God. And, Brother Jim, I have to make an honest confession here: I’ve grown a little, matured a little, but I used to think the music was the preliminaries—get that out of the way so we could have the main stuff. But, I’ve learned something, and it breaks my heart to say it: but, up in Heaven, we’ll probably have more music than we will have preaching. What we’re doing is just getting ready to worship. Oh friend, we need to learn more and more to minister to the Lord. We’re always asking God to bless us.

You know, there are so many commands in the Bible to bless the Lord. Have you ever thought about that? *“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me”* (Psalm 103:1). And so, Acts 13:2: *“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”* As they were ministering to God, God began to speak to them, and God gave wisdom that began the great missionary enterprise. God does have a way of mystically speaking to your heart and giving you wisdom. In Nehemiah 7:5, Nehemiah is talking, and Nehemiah says this: *“And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people”*—“God put it in my heart.” Have you ever had God put anything in your heart? Have you ever had the Holy Spirit just speak to you?

Now, we’re on kind of eggshells here a little bit, because you need to be careful of inner voices. You need to check out that inner voice speaking: “Could it be the devil speaking, or could it be audio suggestion? I mean, how do I know whether it’s God speaking, the devil speaking, or audio suggestion?” Let me give you three little guides, little thoughts, here.

1. If an Experience is Contrary to Scripture, Then You Know It is Wrong

Number one: Everything that God says will never disagree with scripture. And so, any kind of experience that you have, if it’s contrary to scripture, then you know it is wrong. I’ll give you a classic example of that: Peter, James, and John were with the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. They saw Jesus glorified, and they heard God the Father speaking out of Heaven. And then, Peter tells about that in 2 Peter 1:17–18, and he says of Jesus, *“For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount”*—now, I’ll tell you, you talk about some thing that ought to be authentication of something; here they are: they are eyewitnesses. They saw

Jesus transfigured; they heard God the Father speaking from Heaven. Moses and Elijah appeared. It's just a wonderful time. And, Peter says, "We heard this. We saw it. We were there." But then, he says—"*We have also a more sure word of prophecy*" (2 Peter 1:17–19)—"We've got something more sure than what we saw and what we heard; it is the Word of God."

Now, what I'm saying is this: dear friend, any kind of vision that you have, any kind of voice that you hear, even if you think you've heard God speak out of Heaven—I mean, right now, if you were to go to your bedroom tonight, and someone were to say to you in the middle of the night, "John, this is God speaking." "Yes, Lord?" "I want you to do this or that"—if it were contrary to the Word of God, then it's not God. If it's contrary to the Bible, then it's not God—it's just not God. Peter said, "We heard God speak, but," he says, "I've got something more sure than that. We have..."

2. If It is a Compulsion, Then It is Probably Not God

I'll tell you something else—if that inner voice that you think you hear is God, you can check it out this way: if it is a compulsion, then it is probably not God. God guides, but He doesn't shove. Lies lead us. "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*" (Romans 8:14). I hear of people who are compulsive, obsessed, and compelled to do certain things. That's not the way God works. And, I'll tell you something else about God: God's voice is persistent. If God is speaking to you, how do you know whether it's just a whim? How do you know whether it's just some idea that popped into your mind and will pop out again pretty soon? "Well," you say, "Lord, if this is you speaking, then continue to speak." Samuel waited until the fourth call to hear the Lord. I mean, he heard the Lord, and God called, and God called again. And, if you think that God is speaking to you, then just simply say, "Lord, if this is You speaking, then continue to confirm it."

When God first called me into the ministry, I got a germ thought in my mind that God might want me to preach. Now folks, that was strange to me, because the first time any body called me to speak in public was in a Sunday school classroom, and they called on me to dismiss in prayer. And, do you know what I told the teacher? "I'm sorry. I can't do it." It embarrassed me, and it embarrassed the teacher. I didn't even think I could lead in prayer. And, by the way, you will never have to worry about me calling on you unless I've already heard you pray in public at some other time. I won't put you on the spot that way, so relax a little, okay? Now, I shouldn't have been afraid to do that, but if there was anything that I was not, it was a public speaker. Now, I wasn't afraid of much. I moved on the football field, but to stand up and speak like that, I couldn't even—in a Sunday school class with about four guys there. I was embarrassed. I didn't know how to do it. I didn't know what to say and what God would want me to preach. Hey, folks, that was kind of uncomfortable to me. The germ got down there in my heart—a seed,

something there—and I began to say to the Lord, “Lord, do You want me to preach? Me?” And then, after a while, it was, “Lord, I think You want me to preach.” Then, after a while, it was, “Lord, if You want me to preach, then You’d better let me know.” And then, after a while, one day I said, “God, You do want me to preach, and I commit my life to preach the gospel.” And, I’m so glad that God led me in that way.

You see, the Bible says, *“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”* (Proverbs 4:18). At first, it’s just kind of night. Then, the sun begins to peek over the horizon. And, it is gray dawn, and there are shadows you can hardly see. And then, it gets brighter. And, before long, it is high noon; and then, no shadows. God just continues to speak. And, *“the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”* (Proverbs 4:18).

But, dear friend, there is “the wisdom principle.” God will give wisdom. God will speak to the inner heart. God will speak to the mind. God will mystically speak to you. You check it out; make sure it squares with the Word of God. Make sure, dear friend, that God is continuing to speak persistently; and if He does, then you can believe that God is speaking to you.

B. God Will Use Your Mind

Now, under “the wisdom principle,” not only does God speak to you to give you wisdom, but God also uses your mind. You see, God gave you a mind. He expects you to use it. Now, over there in Romans 12—remember what it says: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed”—how?—“by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1–2). Now, God does not wipe out your mind when He saves you and when you present yourself to Him. God renews your mind. Well, why does God renew your mind? So you can use it. You see, the will of God is not so much goose bumps and liver shivers as it is sanctified common sense—thinking with the wisdom that God gives. Donald Gray Barnhouse said, “Ninety percent of the will of God for your life is found above the neck.” Now, what he meant by that is that once you have prayed and asked God for wisdom and God begins to impress your heart, don’t be afraid to use your mind.

Let me give you some scripture. Ephesians 5:17: *“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”* There he speaks of understanding—using your mind. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:15: *“I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.”* All right. Ask God for wisdom. God gives me wisdom. What do I do when I ask God for wisdom and God gives it? I begin to use that wisdom. I use my mind. Again, in Romans 12:1–2, we are told to present our bodies and to have our minds renewed.

Then, he says in Romans 12:3: *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”* Three times in one verse God says, “Think, think, think.” First, surrender; secondly, a renewed mind.

Well, what am I going to do with that renewed mind? I’m going to use it. I’m going to think. You see, the Bible says, *“We have the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16). Don’t think that you’re unspiritual if you begin to rationalize. Don’t think that you’re unspiritual if you begin to rationalize. Well, rationalize is a bad word—to use a rational process. Don’t think that’s unspiritual—not if your mind is committed to Jesus and under the blood. Paul says, *“I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say”* (1 Corinthians 10:15). *“Present your bodies”* (Romans 12:1). *“[And] to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”* (Romans 12:3).

Friend, once you’ve settled “the will principle,” and once you’ve settled “the Word principle,” you’re in the Word. Then, there comes “the wisdom principle,” where you just say, “God, now You promised wisdom. Speak. Impress my heart. And, also enlighten my mind.” You see, folks, look—common sense has to tell you some things.

Frankly, when I get up in the morning, I don’t pray about which sock I’m going to put on first. I don’t even pray about what color the clothes I’m going to wear are, or whether I’m going to brush my teeth on the left side or the right side first. That’s silly, isn’t it? Of course it’s silly. See? I don’t need to pray about those things. I’m trying to act independent of God. I believe this—that when my mind is under the blood, that I’m committed to the Lord. God gave me a mind, and God expects me to use my mind. And, there are a lot of common, ordinary things that I just simply—with my mind under the blood of Jesus Christ—I do what I feel that God would have me do. Common sense tells you so much of the will of God.

But now, wait a minute—let me just put a little warning here, also: common sense cannot always rule. God has a right to interdict common sense. Let me give you an example of that. Simon Peter was fishing. Simon Peter was a commercial fisherman; he knew about fishing. And, Jesus, from the shore, said to Simon Peter, “Hey, have you caught anything?” Peter says, “No, we’ve toiled all night, and we haven’t gotten anything” (John 21:5). Jesus says, “Cast your net on the other side of the boat” (John 21:6). Now, look—if you’ve been fishing all night and you haven’t caught anything, then common sense says there’s no need to do it again, one more time. But, you see, Jesus knew more than Peter’s common sense. So, it’s all right to use your common sense; it’s all right to use your sanctified mind, and it’s all right to use that wisdom. But, remember that you must say, “Nevertheless, at Thy word,” if God especially impresses you.

IV. The Walk Principle

All right. Now, what have I tried to say? There is, first of all, “the will principle”—you surrender your will; secondly, “the Word principle”—you get into the Word of God (and there are great sweeping passages, dynamic passages, where you’ll know the will of God); thirdly, there is “the wisdom principle”—God gives wisdom by impressing you in the inner heart mystically, and God gives wisdom by using the renewed mind. As these work together, you know what God would have you to do in so many instances. Now, the fourth principle, and the final principle, is what I’m going to call “the walk principle.” That is, you get busy and begin to serve the Lord.

Now, the Bible says this: *“In all thy ways acknowledge him”*—that is, as you go, acknowledge the Lord—*“and he shall direct thy paths”* (Proverbs 3:6). God doesn’t direct us as we stand still; God directs us as we move out. You asked, “What is the will of God?” Well, here is the true answer—the nearest thing that should be done that He can do through you. The will of God is not something you do for the rest of your life; it’s something you do for the next 15 seconds. Just like that—“the walk principle.” You see, you be faithful in all of the little things as you go serve the Lord.

The Bible says in Luke 16:10: *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”* What does that mean? It means, dear friend, you do the will of God. If the will of God for you is just a smile at somebody as they walk out of the church, then smile at them. If it’s to pick up a piece of paper off this church lawn, then you do it. If it’s to make an offering tonight in the service, then you do it. The will of God is not primarily a blueprint that He lays out before you, and you study it from beginning to end; it is a scroll that you unroll. And, as I say, *it’s not a roadmap; it’s a relationship.* God shows you a step at a time. *It’s hard to steer a ship that’s not moving.*

When Abraham sent his trusted servant, Eleazar, to seek a bride for Isaac, that servant gave this testimony in Genesis 24:27: *“And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me.” “I being in the way”* (Genesis 24:27)—what does that mean? “As I was going, while I was on my way, the Lord led me.” There is the walk principle.

Now, you begin to walk in the Lord. I mean, today—right now, tonight—you walk in the Lord. This young man is going to Africa as a missionary. I know he’s going to be a good one, because he’s serving Jesus now. One man came to his pastor, and he says, “I believe God wants me to go to Africa as a missionary.” And, the pastor said, “Well, what are you doing for Jesus now?” He says, “Well, not much of anything.” He said, “Well, please don’t go to Africa and do it.” Right? Listen, you be faithful right now.

Sometimes you may not know what God has in His plan for you. Do you remember

when God took Peter out of prison? Well, you don't remember; you weren't... Well, you may have been there, but I mean, most of us weren't there. The colonel—he's been around for some time. So, Peter is in prison, and God sends an angel there. And, the Bible says that they were going out of prison. And, as they were going out of prison, there was an iron gate, and the iron gate was locked. And, they're coming out of prison, and he's escaping, as it were; and there's the iron gate. And, they headed toward the iron gate, and it's not until right when they get to the iron gate that the iron gate opens of its own accord (Acts 12:10). As long as they were back here, the iron gate didn't open.

Now, listen—do you know what the Bible says? Let me give you something sweet in the Book of Proverbs—many of us quote this passage—Proverbs 3:5: *"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."* The word *direct*, here, literally has the idea of a bulldozer clearing the way. It is not just that He opens the way or shows you the way; actually, He clears the way. It's the idea of directing paths. Remember where the Bible says, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make the rough places smooth, the crooked places straight. Every mountain shall be cut off and every valley exalted" (Isaiah 40:3–4). Now, that's not exactly the way it says it, but that's the idea. "Every mountain shall be made low, and every valley shall be exalted" (Isaiah 40:4). That's the same idea that's right here.

Listen, as you go, as you commit your life to the Lord, the Lord will bulldoze for you. The Lord will clear a path for you. I can tell you, my dear friend—not that I've always known and been in the middle of God's will—but I can tell you that as I have obeyed Him, my testimony to you is that God has continued to open doors—God has just continued to open doors.

Conclusion

Here it is—here it is; listen: you want the will of God for your life? Number one: There is "the will factor"—you surrender to Him completely. Number two: There is "the Word principle"—you saturate your life with the Word of God. Number three: There is "the wisdom principle"—you let God give you wisdom as He has promised, by inward impression and by the use of your sanctified mind. Number four: There is "the walk principle"—you begin to serve the Lord day by day. *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way"*—you say, "What if I make a mistake?"—*"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand"* (Psalm 37:23–24). I can show you many people who stepped out of the will of God, but God loved them and still used them. And, God loves you. And, you may be 90 years old tonight, but God has a will for your life, and you need to get in it right now.

Let's bow our heads together in prayer.

Principles to Discover the Will of God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 26, 1997

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 32:8–9

*“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which
thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”*

PSALMS 32:8

Outline

Introduction

I. The Reasons for Seeking the Will of God

- A. God’s Promise
- B. God’s Presence
- C. God’s Power
- D. God’s Provision

II. The Way to Know the Will of God

- A. Confession
- B. Consecration
- C. Concentration
 - 1. The Word of God
 - 2. The Witness of the Holy Spirit
 - 3. The Wisdom of God
 - 4. The People of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Most of us—all of us—if we are walking, living, breathing, sensitive Christians, want the will of God in our lives. Life’s greatest achievement is to discover and to do the will of God, whatever that might be.

Now turn, if you would please, to Psalms 32 and verse 8, and we’re going to find a promise. And then, we’re going to spend some time together just studying the Bible and finding some principles to help us to discover the will of God for our lives, because I’m praying that God will help each of us to know exactly what it is that He wants us to do in His own timing, when He wants to reveal it to us. Now, you know, as I know—I hope you already know—that God’s will is not a roadmap. He doesn’t give us a roadmap; He

gives us a relationship. And so, the will of God unfolds to us day by day, as He says, *“This is the way, walk ye in it.”* (Isaiah 30:21)

And, with that in mind, in Psalms 32, verse 8, we find this wonderful promise from the Lord. He says, *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.”* (Psalms 32:8) Now, isn't that a great promise? *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”* (Psalms 32:8) Now, what does that mean?

Well, all of us who are married know exactly what that means. If you've ever been in a restaurant and started to talk about something, and your wife looks at you and says, *“Don't say any more about that subject,”* she just looks and you know that's it. Human beings who have a close relationship can speak with their eyes without speaking a word. Isn't that true?

When my children were little, I'd be preaching away, and they'd be sitting on the front row, maybe misbehaving. And, the people in the congregation wouldn't know it, but I could give them a look during the message which means, *“When I get home, you're doing to get it,”* and go right on preaching. They knew exactly what I meant by that look. That is sensitivity.

Now, contrariwise to that, look at the next verse: he says, *“Be...not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.”* (Psalms 32:9) Now, why be horsey—why be mulish—when you can have a sensitive relationship with the Lord and let God guide you with His eye? Now, that's what God is saying—is that we need to be very sensitive to His leadership so we can know His will. What is success? Success is a person who finds and does the will of God for his life—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else, nothing but. But, the problem with many of us, even those of us who are saved, we are stumbling in darkness. Somebody has described modern man as *“a brilliant creature who has lost his way in the dark.”*

Now, God has a plan for my life and for your life. It would be a shame for you to miss it. I hear people just shrug their shoulders and say, *“Well, if it were not God's will, it would not have happened.”* Friend, I beg to differ. God's will is not very frequently done on this earth. If it were, then why would Jesus teach us to pray, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done [on] earth, as it is in heaven”?* (Matthew 6:10) Why would He teach us to pray for it if it's automatically done? Do you think rape, and arson, and pillage, and child abuse, and drug abuse, and blasphemy is God's will? Of course not. God's will is not automatically done. But, God does have a will for my life and for your life, and it is very clear.

Now, we may think that we are only an incident or an accident, but we are not an incident or an accident. We are very special. Jesus teaches that *“the very hairs of [our]*

head are...numbered." (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7) And so, God has promised to guide us. Psalms 32, verse 8: He said, "*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.*" (Psalms 32:8)

And then, look, if you will, in the book of Isaiah. And, by the way, we're just going to look at a lot of scriptures tonight. It's kind of like a Bible drill. And, I'm going to have you turn to them, if you will. I think it'll do us good. Perhaps it will rivet these verses in our heart and in our mind. Isaiah chapter 30 and verse 21—we find another wonderful promise from the Lord: God says, "*And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk...in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.*" (Isaiah 30:21) What a great promise—to have God guiding us with His eye, speaking with His voice, saying, "*This is the way, walk...in it.*" (Isaiah 30:21)

And then, Jesus—these are Old Testament scriptures—but Jesus said in the New Testament... And, you might want to turn to this: John chapter 16 in the New Testament. And look, if you will, in verse 13—a wonderful, wonderful promise about the Holy Spirit. He says here in John chapter 16 and verse 13: "*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.*" (John 16:13) Now, we have God guiding us with His eye, speaking with His voice, and then we have the Holy Spirit of God inside of us instructing us and teaching us. And, Jesus promised that "*when...the [Holy] Spirit...is come, he will guide [us] into all truth.*" (John 16:13)

Now, just keep on going through the Bible and turn to the book of Romans, if you will, and look in Romans chapter 8 and verse 14. Paul, I think, speaking up, picking up on what the Lord Jesus said, said, "*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*" (Romans 8:14) I think you could say that, if you are a son of God, that God's Holy Spirit is given to you to lead you. "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*" (Romans 8:14) Now, those verses are enough to tell me—and, I think, to tell you—that we ought not to be floundering around trying to work things out in our own life, guessing, stumbling, faltering, failing, knocking things over, and come to the end of our life and say that "youth was a mistake, manhood was a struggle, and old age a regret." But, we ought to come to the end of our life and say, "I've finished my course." That's what the Apostle Paul said. Or, as saith the Lord Jesus, "*I have finished the work [that you gave] me to do.*" (John 17:4)

Now, God has a will for your life and a plan for your life—not just in your church life or in the missionary realm of your life. God has a plan for your life in education. God has a plan for your life in business. God has a plan for your life in marriage. And, it's up for us—it's up to us—to find, to follow, and to finish that plan for our lives. Now, I'm hoping in this World Missions Conference that God will be speaking to some and saying, "My plan—my will—for you is world missions." But, whatever it is, we need to, because if we do what God would have us to do, whether it's here at home or abroad, certainly God's

enterprise here and abroad will be fulfilled.

I. The Reasons for Seeking the Will of God

So, what are the reasons for seeking the will of God?

A. God's Promise

First of all, God's promise. All of these verses that I've been giving to you deal with a promise of God to guide us. And, I think you'll have to admit that these are wonderful promises. And, there does not seem to be any equivocation or stutter or stammer with the fact that God wants to guide us. If you agree with that, say "amen." All right, God wants to guide you. God wants to guide me. Now, that's the first reason that I would have for seeking the will of God—is that I have such a wonderful promise.

B. God's Presence

Now, here's a second reason: when I'm in the will of God, I have God's wonderful presence. Now, turn to the Great Commission. It's at Romans—excuse me, Matthew—28:19 and 20, and see what the Lord Jesus Christ has promised to those of us who obey Him and do His will. Matthew 28:19–20. I think most of us know this passage by heart. But, our Lord—He gave the Great Commission to us, and He said this: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, [and] baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:19–20)—or the end of the age, literally.

Somewhere, years ago, I read about a Chinaman, or a Chinese man, whose name was Mr. Lo. And, when he read this verse, he said it had a special significance to him—that God was speaking to him personally and saying, *“Lo, I am with you always.”* (Matthew 28:20) Well, you could put your name in there and say, “Adrian, I'm with you always,” because what He says to all, He says to each, and what He says to each, He says to all. And, when I am in the slipstream of God's will, God's presence is especially manifest to me.

I can remember as a youngster the first assignment I ever had—doing something for Christ in a missionary way was an assignment my mother gave me. She had volunteered in our local church to go from house to house and door to door taking a survey. And, she really didn't want to do it, so she talked me into doing it. And, I was a new Christian, a teenage boy, and I was petrified to go from house to house, door to door. This was the verse that enabled me to do it. I had it in my mind. Jesus said He would go with me. And so, when I went from house to house and door to door, I just...I said, “Now Lord Jesus, you promised if I would go and make disciples that you would go with.” And, you know, the place of God's purpose is the place of God's presence. And,

sometimes it may seem that God is far away from you. It's not that God is far away from you; it is that you're far away from God. When you get in the slipstream of God's purpose, God becomes real to you. I can, you know, I can... I don't think God is ever more real to me than when I am preaching the Word of God or when I am ministering and trying to win a soul to Christ. I don't even seem to have any doubt whatever of God's presence because I'm doing God's will.

C. **God's Power**

Now, I'm just giving you some reasons to say, "I want to know and do the will of God." The first is God has given us a promise that we can know His will. And then, God's presence is so wonderful there when we're in the place of God's purpose. And then, the next thing that is so real when you find the will of God is that you discover God's power in your life in an incredible way. You see, the place of God's purpose and the place of God's plan is the place of God's power. I believe this: I believe that when you're in the will of God you are immortal until God has finished with you—that God is just going to take care of you, He's going to guide you, He's going to protect you. It doesn't mean that you will not suffer any pain, any heartache. There'll be plenty of that. But, God is going to release His power to you in a very special way.

Sometimes those of us who are parents are concerned about our children going overseas in these troublous times in which we have. Don't worry about them if they're in the will of God. They'll be a lot safer over there than they would be in their bedroom at home. I submit to you that Simon Peter was safer walking on the water than he would have been in the boat—don't you believe that?—because Jesus said, "Come." The place of His purpose is not only the place of His presence, where He's very real to you, but it is the place where God releases His power to you in a very special way.

D. **God's Provision**

Now, another reason that I think that... And, I'm going to rush on here, and just without referencing these and just... I think you remember the story. But, when we're in the place of God's purpose, there's His presence, there's His power, and there is His provision. God's work is never stopped for a lack of resources—never! It's only stopped for a lack of obedience and faith.

God told Elisha—He said, "I want you to go to a particular place," and He said, "I have instructed a widow woman to feed you there." (1 Kings 17:9) And, Elisha went, and there was a certain woman, you remember, that God had to work a miracle, because this woman had that...she was running out of resources. But, God miraculously supplied her resources. Now, suppose Elisha had not gone where God had told him to go? Would God have fed him? I don't know. But, I do know this: that He said, "I have instructed a widow woman to feed you there." And, the place of His

presence is the place of His power. That's where the miracle was done. And, the place of His presence and the place of His power was the place of His provision.

I can tell you this: that Joyce and I have all of our life seen God provide for us and take care of us. And, I did not always pastor a church that provides for me like Bellevue Church provides for me. When Joyce and I got married... Where is Joyce right now? Are you in this service, honey? You skipping out on me? Where is Joyce? Is she here? Stand up, darling. Where is she? There she is. Don't you skip prayer meeting. How much did we have when we went on our honeymoon? I've forgotten. How much? Fifty dollars! That's what we started out on our honeymoon with—fifty dollars. Folks, you can't have a big honeymoon on fifty dollars. I'm telling you, we went to school. We didn't have two nickels to rub together. I worked. I worked as a carpenter. I worked as a construction worker, an elevator mechanic, a used car salesman, a butcher. I've worked as a stock clerk, a busboy, a fruit packer, a termite inspector—really. And, I didn't inspect termites; I inspected for termites. But, I've done all of that.

I can remember in college walking home from my job, where I was stacking groceries in the A&P, and stopping at a restaurant, looking at the menu. Reached in my pocket—I had twenty-one cents. The cheese sandwich was twenty cents. I said, "I want the cheese sandwich." I didn't have any choice. When they said, "Do you want anything to drink?" I said, "No." I had that one penny left. But, I tell you, I never missed a meal, never missed a meal—from God's hand to our mouth. God has taken care of us. And, I would be... You know, I've just seen God. We've always tried to tithe—not *try to*, *did* tithe, and give beyond the tithe always. And, God has been so faithful.

David said, "*[Once I was] young, and now [I'm] old; yet [I've] not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalms 37:25) And, God has given us an abundance—and more than an abundance. And, Paul says, "I know how to abound and how to suffer need, but I've learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." (Philippians 4:11–12) The place of God's presence, and purpose, and power is the place of His provision. God's work is not stopped because of a lack of resources.

I heard a... I had a boy one time tell me that he was called into the ministry and God wanted him to go to seminary. I said, "Well, are you going?" He said, "No, not yet." I said, "Why not?" He said, "I can't afford it." I said, "Well, if I could get a millionaire to underwrite you, would you go?" "Oh," he said, "I sure would." He thought I knew a millionaire. I didn't know a millionaire, and he thought I knew one. I said, "If I can get a millionaire to underwrite you, would you go?" And, he said, "I sure would." I said, "Well, you have the One who owns the world. I mean, if He has called you—if God has called you—I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but God will provide." He said, "You go there. There's a widow woman going to feed you there." (1 Kings 17:9)

II. The Way to Know the Will of God

So, now, how are you going to know the will of God? These are just reasons for doing it. But, how are you going to know it?

A. Confession

Well, let me suggest that, first of all, that you get your heart absolutely clean and get your motive absolutely clear. Get your heart absolutely clean and get your motive absolutely clear. Now, we talk about the great prayer promises. I want to give you a great prayer promise. You ready for a great prayer promise? It's found in Psalms 66 and verse 18, and here's what it says: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* (Psalms 66:18) That's a promise—not a kind of promise we like to just cling on to, but it is a promise. You see, if you want God to lead you, you've got to have a heart clean. To live in sin is to stumble in darkness.

Turn to 1 John chapter 1—1 John. Now, that's back toward the back—not the Gospel of John; almost to the book of Revelation. Turn to that with me for a moment. And, I don't hear many pages turning out there. Am I getting deaf? All right, 1 John 1, and look in verses 5 and 6—now, watch it: *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (1 John 5:5–7) Now, this is just simply a way of saying that to live in sin is to stumble in darkness. And, these sins don't have to be the vile, gross sins of the world—just disobedience.

Look in chapter 2, verses 9 through 11: *"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now"*—maybe the reason you can't find the will of God for your life and God's not shining any light on your path is some attitude you have to someone—*"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because...darkness hath blinded his eyes."* (1 John 2:9–11) Did you know it may be just that simple? You say, "Why can't I find the will of God for my life? Why isn't God speaking to me?" Well, is your heart headquarters for hate? Are you feeding a fever—nursing a grudge—somehow in your heart and in your life? Perhaps—perhaps—there's some idol in your life. Maybe it's your family. Maybe it's your business. Maybe it's your hobby.

Do you know what God said in Ezekiel to Ezekiel the prophet concerning those people? Let's turn to Ezekiel chapter 14. That's in the Old Testament. Let's just look at it here for a moment—I said I was going to make you turn to these—Ezekiel chapter 14 and look in verse 3: God says to Ezekiel, concerning the people of Israel and the elders

of Israel, *“Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and [have] put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?”* (Ezekiel 14:3) God says, “When a man has an idol in his heart, he has the stumbling block of sin right in front of him.” (Ezekiel 14:3) God said, “Should I answer any questions for them?” (Ezekiel 14:3) That’s the plain English: *“Should I be enquired of at all by them?”* (Ezekiel 14:3) What’s the obvious answer? No! If you want to know the will of God for your heart and for your life, get your heart clean, get your motive clear.

B. Consecration

Now, here’s the next thing. But, first of all, let’s just call that confession. Let’s alliterate it so we can remember it. Confession: be absolutely, totally clean—absolutely, totally clean. Heart clean. Motive clear. Number two: Consecration. It’s not enough merely to be clean; you’ve got to be given over to the Lord in consecration.

Now, turn to Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 6. And, it’s just a missionary sermon. We’re going everywhere preaching the gospel, so just... Proverbs chapter 3 and verse 6. So many times when people are asked to give their favorite verse, this is a verse people will give. It’s a wonderful verse, but I don’t want you to have it in your memory; I want you to have it in your life, not merely in your memory. *“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto [thy] own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him”*—not in some of them; in all of them—*“and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.”* (Proverbs 3:5–7) You see, not only should there be no sin; there should be no stubbornness. Many of us are not sincere when we say, “Lord, we want to know your will.” Many times we don’t listen to God; we try to get God to agree with us. But, we have to have lives that are consecrated to the Lord.

C. Concentration

Now, here’s the third thing: confession, consecration, and concentration. You have to listen—you have to listen. You know, could it be that God is speaking to you and you’re not listening? Do you have a quiet time before the Lord to listen and say, “Speak, Lord. I want to hear what you say,” consecrate, and to think?

Turn to Romans chapter 12, if you will for a moment, and look at this verse—Romans chapter 12: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice”*—that’s consecration—*“holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service...be not conformed to this world”*—there’s that cleansing—*“but be...transformed by the renewing of your mind”*—now, when you present yourself to the Lord, you’re totally consecrated because of His death for you at Calvary. Those are the mercies of God. God does something in your mind. God renews

your mind. He doesn't raise your IQ, but He renews your mind—*“that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”*—that's what we're talking about, isn't it? God's good, perfect, and acceptable will? It means you're going to prove it; it means you're going to discover it, find it, in a very applicable way. It's going to be proven out in your own heart and in your own life. And, furthermore, you will prove that it is good, perfect, and acceptable. But, right after that, notice what he says in verse 3—*“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly.”* (Romans 12:1–3) Think, think, think—three times in one verse.

Why on earth do you think God renewed your mind? So you put it on a shelf? No! For you to think with it. Most of the will of God is found between your ears. I'm going to say that later on, but again, in another way, but most of the will of God is found between your ears. When you come with confession and consecration, you present your body a living sacrifice; God renews your mind. And then, you come with that concentration. You think and say, “God, who am I? What did you make me to do?” And, God then begins to use the thought process of a sanctified mind. Wisdom is not getting warm around the heart and wet around the lashes. That's emotion. Wisdom is thinking, thinking, thinking with the mind of Christ—a renewed mind. Don't think that you're unspiritual if you use your mind. Now, when you're using your mind—and I'm almost finished now—but when you're using your mind, what will go through your mind? How will your mind begin to process this material? Well, several things will happen.

1. The Word of God

First of all, your mind will fix on the Word of God. The Word of God is the major tool that your mind will use. Psalms 119:105—don't turn to this one, because I think you know it by heart—but: *“Thy word is”*—what?—*“a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”* Isn't that what we're talking about—walking in the light, knowing God's will? And, *“thy word...”* (Psalms 119:105) You see, you don't—you don't—ever need any... You don't need to pray about or seek guidance for something God has commanded for you to do or not to do. So much of the will of God is in the Word of God.

Now, if you're a young lady here, and you're in love with an unsaved boy, and you come to me and say, “Pastor, would you pray with me whether or not I ought to marry Joey?” no, I wouldn't pray with you about it. I'd just say, “Don't marry him,” because you're not to *“be...unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”* (2 Corinthians 6:14) You don't have to pray about that. A man says, “Would you pray with me whether or not I ought to divorce my wife for Susie?” No, I won't pray with you about it. I'd hit you over the head, but I won't pray with you about it. No! The will of God is so often there right in the Word of God. Now, if a thing is right, it is right, and no amount of praying will change it. If a thing is wrong, it is wrong, and no amount of praying will change it. And so, in

many ways, the Bible is your guidebook.

2. The Witness of the Holy Spirit

Now, here's another way, however, that you might consider to find God's will, because there are a lot of things that are not revealed in the Bible. Where should you go to school? What field should you serve in? What job should you take? What class should you teach? But, you see, God also works supernaturally in your mind. The Holy Spirit of God is able to put thoughts into your mind.

Now, remember the passage over there in Romans 8, verse 14? "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*" (Romans 8:14) Well, let's see how that works out. Look—turn to Acts chapter 10 for just a moment—Acts chapter 10—and look in verse 19. Here is Simon Peter, who is a missionary to the Gentiles. And, how did he know what to do? Well, verse 19: "*While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*" (Acts 10:19–20) Now, the Spirit said to him. Now folks, that's really mysterious. But, God's Holy Spirit speaks to you. Now, the Holy Spirit has never spoken to me and said, "Now Adrian..." Scare me to death. But, I can tell you there are times when the Spirit of God has spoken to my heart. And, I think every Christian who's been a Christian for any time at all can say, "You know, God—God—showed me something. God spoke to my heart."

Look—look, if you will—in chapter 13—Acts chapter 13 and verse 2: "*[And] as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*" (Acts 13:2) That's the Holy Spirit of God. Now, how did the Holy Spirit of God speak to them? I really don't know. By those strange, mysterious ways that we feel impressed in our spirit. You say, "How do I know whether it's autosuggestion or the Holy Spirit? How do I know whether it's a demon spirit or a Holy Spirit?" Well, the Bible says we "*try the spirits whether they [be] of God.*" (1 John 4:1) But, He also said—Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice*"—"my sheep hear my voice." (John 10:27)

Look, if you will, in Acts chapter 16 and verse 7: "*[And] after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.*" (Acts 16:7) Plain English: They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Holy Spirit said, "Hey, you can't go over there." The Spirit said, "No." How He did that? I would have had to have been there and been inside of their hearts and lives to know that. But, this is more than conscience. Conscience cannot tell you which of the right things you ought to do; it can just tell you not to do the wrong things. But, there are many right things. That's this.

3. The Wisdom of God

So, the will of God. You use your mind—that's concentration. But, your mind is many times enlightened, impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Then, along with the Word of God

and the witness of the Holy Spirit, there is the wisdom that God gives you, which is really sanctified common sense.

Turn to James chapter 1 and verse 5—James 1 (back toward the back). Again, it'll do you good to turn to these and maybe mark them in your Bible. Here is one of the great promises: *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, [who] giveth to all men"*—not to some. And ladies, the word *men* is in italics. It means He just give to all—*"liberally, and upbraideth not"*—that means He'll give you plenty of wisdom. He won't scold you for asking. He—*"upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."* (James 1:5:5–6) God will give you wisdom. Now, this is far better than emotion. And, by the way, the witness of the Spirit is not emotion; it's deeper than that. So many people going around with a lump in their throat and a vacuum in their head. Wisdom is not visions. It's not strange feelings. It's not warm emotions. It is sanctified common sense.

4. The People of God

I must hurry on. Let me tell you another way that you can know the will of God, and that is God will bring godly people into your life that you can consult with and help you—God's workers. Turn to Proverbs, if you will, and look, if you will, in chapter 12 and verse 15: *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."* (Proverbs 12:15)

When I was ordained into the ministry, I was a nineteen-year-old boy, and they ordained me in the ministry. And, they told me before I went into that ordination service—they said, "Now Adrian, one question that the older men will probably ask you is this question: 'If we refuse to recommend your ordination, what would you do?'" I said, "Well, what should I say?" They said, "Well, you've got to show that you really know that God has called you to preach. So, if they say, 'We refuse to recommend your ordination,' then you ought to just say, 'Well, God called me, and I'm going to preach anyway, regardless of what you do.'" And, you know, that's ultimately bottom line. I guess that's true. But, I wouldn't have said—they didn't ask me that question—but I was all ready to answer it, I think, if they'd ask me that. But, I wouldn't give that answer today. If I sat in a group of wise and godly people, and they said, "We think you're headed in the wrong direction," I would re-examine my heart—I would re-examine my heart. We have so many people today who think they know everything. They are a law unto themselves. And, I've counseled with people, and they say, "Well, God has told me so-and-so." I just say, "Well, you've appealed to the Ultimate. I cast you on God." But friend, we need a little more humility. Did you know that? And, none of us are quite a law unto ourselves. And, one of the ways that God can use us is to listen to the advice of other people, because He'll use other people. Now, make certain that it's the wise that you get advice from. I wouldn't go to the guy who changes the oil in your car to get

advice about brain surgery. Make sure that it is a wise person.

Conclusion

And, last of all, when you put all of these things together—I'm talking about thinking, thinking, thinking; using that which is between your ears, renewed by the Holy Spirit—you're going to find out that above it all, beyond it all, and through it all, when you just love God and do as best you know how, God providentially just guides your life—He does. And, that's so wonderful. Romans 8:28 is still there, and—that *"all things work together for good to [those who] love God"*—and even where we make a mistake, God overrules.

I was in Jacksonville, Florida, in a revival meeting. We were going out soul winning. And, I was with a boy named Ernie many years ago, and he was supposed to know where everything was in Jacksonville. We only had a certain amount of time. And, we prayed and prayed and prayed, and went through this street and that street, and got further and further, I think, away from where we ought to be, finally ended up at almost a dead end. And, there was a little one-room house, and that wasn't the place. As a matter of fact, I found out later, I think, we were on the complete opposite side of town. Now, there was that little place. And, we went up and knocked on the door, and there was a man in that place. His name was Mr. Phew. I'll never forget it: P-H-E-W—Phew. I've only ever met one man named Mr. Phew. And, Mr. Phew—he was an old fellow, stooped, grey, whiskered, old guy. He came to the door, and we said, "Are you So-and-so?" He said, "No." Said, "I'm... My name is Phew." And, our time was up there, and we just said, "Well, sir, can we just come in and talk with you a little bit?" He said, "Well, come on in."

We went in that room. There was a bed in there and a stove in there, and whether they had an restroom in there, I don't know. It's just a very small, small house. And, we began to talk with that man. I found out he was a preacher's son. He said, "Well, my father was a preacher." And, I said, "Well, Mr. Phew, then are you saved?" "Well," he said, "no, I'm not saved." And, I said, "You're not? Your father was a preacher?" I said, "Do you intend to get saved?" He said, "Well, well, I guess so, one of these days." And, I looked at the old guy. I said, "Mr. Phew, you're not getting any younger." And, God broke his heart, and I can remember. His wife was standing over there at the stove. I said, "Mr. Phew, will you pray with us?" And, we kneeled by his bed, and that old man sobbed his heart out. And, I can picture it right now in my mind. That whole little house was shaking with the convulsive sobs of that man as he wept his way into the arms of Jesus.

You know, I thought, "That was not a wrong address. That was... We were there like a, I think, like a guided missile." And, I believe his preacher daddy had prayed for him,

and that prayer missile had a delayed detonation, as that old man, just on the threshold in the Christless eternity, got saved. And, I believe, when we're saved and walking in the Spirit, even a mistake can be right. God guides His children. And, you'll hear a voice behind you, saying, "*This is the way, walk ye in it.*" (Isaiah 30:21)

It may be that God is calling some of you to be a missionary—I mean, an overseas missionary. It may be that God is calling some of you to the ministry. Dr. Gray Allison—I saw Dr. Allison here tonight. I love our seminary president. He is one of my all-time heroes. That guy had me so—that sir, mister, man, doctor, reverend—had me so under conviction in seminary. He would talk about these mission fields, and he talked about places in the northeast and all of these things—where you ought to go and what you ought to do. When I came out of seminary, I could have just as easily gone to the mission field—just as easily have gone into full-time evangelism or into the pastorate. I did not know. I was sitting on a three-legged stool. I didn't know which of the three. God, subsequently, led me into the pastorate.

But, you may be here tonight and not knowing whether God's calling you to be a missionary, a pastor, an evangelist, or something else. But, you say, "God is calling me. He's calling me." I hope you'll answer that call and begin to prepare. I'm—we're all—full-time Christians, but there are certain people that God separates and puts into the ministry. Maybe that's you, or maybe God is calling you to just to be a soul winner here. I don't mean just in the diminutive sense, but to be a soul winner—a godly, Christian physician, or lawyer, or entrepreneur, clerk, whatever. Success is nothing more, nothing less, than finding, following, and finishing God's will for your life.

Let's just pray. Would you pray and say, "Lord, you promised to lead. Lord, lead me. Show me your will. Teach me in the way that I should go"? Now, that doesn't mean that, when you pray that prayer, you're going to suddenly get a flash of inspiration and you're going to see the future. God will probably hide the future from you. It just simply means you're surrendering to the impulses of the Spirit—not to do the will of God for the rest of your life as much as to do the will of God for the next fifteen minutes. It's hard to steer a ship that's not moving. Now, what you really need to do is to get your heart clean, your motive clear, consecrate your life to Jesus, and begin to use that renewed mind that He gives you. Thank you, Lord, for leading us. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

The Power of Perpetual Praise

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 20, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 34:1–17

“I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

PSALMS 34:1

Outline

Introduction

- A. Who?
- B. What?
- C. When?
- D. Where?
- E. Why?

- I. When You Praise, Your Faith Is Bolstered
- II. When You Praise, Your Fears Are Banished
- III. When You Praise, Your Foes Are Beaten
- IV. When You Praise, Favors Are Bestowed
- V. When You Praise, Your Future Is Brightened

Conclusion

Introduction

Open God’s Word, and find a place here that we might study and praise God together through that study. I want you to find, please, Psalm 34. Dr. Robert G. Lee, who is a former pastor of this church, would often sign his name, and underneath his name he would sign “Psalm 34.” Often people ask me if I would autograph a Bible, and that’s a distinct honor for me—not because I think that I am anybody’s hero, but if anybody does recognize the presence of Jesus and, for whatever reason, want to have a pastor’s signature in their Bible, I’ve found myself signing the Bible, and often I will put “Psalm 34” underneath that name. And, I was doing this before I knew that that’s what Dr. Lee would do. And then, I noticed that he loved Psalm 34. Of course, sometimes I might put Romans 8:28, or Romans 1:16, or some other pertinent verse. But, more frequently than any other, I think I would sign, “Adrian Rogers, Psalm 34,” because Psalm 34 is the desire of my heart, and verse 1 is a verse that has, in many ways, transformed my life.

I was saved, and I was a pastor before I learned the secret of Psalm 34. But, when I learned it, I learned something wonderful. And, I say, “when I learned it” with trepidation

because I am still learning the proof of Psalm 34. And, I want to speak to you tonight on this subject: “The Power of Perpetual Praise”—“The Power of Perpetual Praise.” Here is the resolution of the psalmist—the psalm of David, the sweet singer: and David said, “*I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth*” (Psalm 34:1). And, while we’re going to look some more at the rest of the psalm, we could just pull over and park right there to hear what David said.

A. **Who?**

First of all, whom is he talking about? Himself. He said, “*I will [praise] the LORD*” (Psalm 34:1). Listen, my friend, nobody can praise God for you. People can praise God all around you, but if you don’t worship from that seat where you are tonight, there will be no worship in that seat. Church attendance is not a spectator sport. If you come to hear someone preach, and come to hear someone sing, and you don’t praise God, you have robbed yourself of one of the greatest joys and one of the greatest blessings. And, also, you have denuded God of the glory that belongs to Him. Who will do it? I will do it. And, I want you to say, “And me, too—me, too. I will praise the Lord.” What? “*I will bless the LORD*” (Psalm 34:1).

B. **What?**

Did you know that you can bless God? How many times have we prayed and said, “O God, bless me”? I think, over and over again, we pray for a blessing. But, have you ever thought about the fact that you bless God? “*Bless the LORD, O my soul*” (Psalm 103:1). Praise blesses our Lord, and He alone is worthy of that praise. Who will do it? I will. What will I do? “*I will bless the LORD*” (Psalm 34:1).

C. **When?**

When will I do it? Oh, here’s the secret: at all times. Now, this is the thing that is transforming my life, and I’m still learning. In the good times, in the bad times, in the juicy times, in the dry times, in the up times, in the down times, in the daytime, in the nighttime—“at all times I will bless the Lord: His praise shall be continually upon my lips and in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1). You say, “Well, Pastor, I can’t praise Him when I’m hurting, can I?” That’s when you really ought to praise Him. “When I’m sad?” Yes, praise Him. Praise Him, friend, and turn the bad times into good times by praise. If you’re having difficulty in your prayer life, pull out some of the groans and shove in a few hallelujahs, and you’re going to find out that it will transform your life.

D. **Where?**

Now, not only *who* and *what* and *when*, but where will that praise be? “*In my mouth*” (Psalm 34:1). That’s very important. You say, “Well, I’ll just praise Him in my heart, but I don’t say much about it. It’s very personal thing, you know.” Well, friend, you need to

praise Him verbally. You need to open your mouth and let His praise get out of your heart and get into your mouth. You should not sit here in a worship service a wooden Indian. I see some folks out there—you know, “Bless me if You can.” Why don’t you praise God? Why don’t you, when you meet one another, give Him a word of praise? Praise Him publicly, and praise Him privately, because if you do it all times, you’re either in public or in private. And, in public and in private, if that’s part of all times, then you ought to be praising God. I mean, bless the Lord. I really wonder about this—Brother Jim, you and I have talked about it—I really wonder if it is praise if it’s not articulated. I mean, praise is to give Him glory. How does He get the glory if it’s not articulated? You say, “Well, He knows what’s in my heart.” Well, He may, but, you know, this psalm says—well, He does know, not He *may*; indeed, He does know—but this psalm says that that praise is to be in your mouth (Psalm 34:1).

E. **Why?**

Why? Why? Well, listen: he goes on to say that *“the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad”* (Psalm 34:1). Now, if you don’t put it in your mouth, the humble can’t hear. And, if the humble cannot hear, then the humble can’t be glad by your praise. Now, why praise Him? The rest of the psalm is an answer as to the answer of perpetual praise. All right. You ready?

I. **When You Praise, Your Faith Is Bolstered**

Number one: When you praise, your faith is bolstered. Nothing will help your faith energize, vitalize, stimulate your faith like praise. When you boast in the Lord, when you brag in the Lord, make your boast in the Lord, at that time you say to yourself, “You know, God is really a great God,” when you exalt His name. *“My soul shall make her boast in the LORD”* (Psalm 34:2). You see, this is the secret of faith. It’s not great faith in God that you need; it’s faith in a great God. When you have faith in a great God, then your faith becomes great faith. I’m not against great faith, but don’t put the emphasis upon your faith. Put your emphasis upon who He is. And, when you make your boast in the Lord, you’re going to find, as you boast in the Lord, as you glory in the Lord, as you bless the Lord, you’re going to find out that your faith grows.

Faith is the highest occupation of angels. Why, even the rocks would cry out if you would fail to praise the Lord. You see, faith just honors God; and, therefore, God...praise honors God—and, therefore, God honors praise. Just as profanity degrades God, praise glorifies God. The word *worship* is actually a compilation of the Old English *worth-ship*—*worth-ship*. Tell me how much you praise, and I’ll tell you what God is worth to you. Tell me about your worship, and I’ll tell you what you think of God. He is worthy of our praise—He is worthy of our praise. And, the Bible says, “The humble

will be made glad” (Psalm 34:2).

We need to encourage one another. We live in a generation that’s got a lot of bad news. I don’t like to read the newspapers much anymore, do you? I mean, things are just kind of caving in round about us. That’s all the more reason that we ought to be going around constantly praising the Lord. Do you know folks that...they can brighten up a room just by leaving it? Do you know any people like that? I know folks like that. I mean, they’re just...they’ve just got this little cloud of gloom over their head; and everywhere they go, they’re just spreading gloom all around. Walk into a place, walk into a group of men, walk into a group of ladies, walk into a Sunday School class, come here on Sunday morning, greet your family at breakfast—wherever it is—with a “praise the Lord; glory to God.” I’m not talking about a smart-alecky phrase; I’m talking about a praise that comes out of your heart because you truly know and love Him. And, as you praise Him, your faith will grow.

Do you know what praise really is? It is faith turned inside out. Have you ever thought about the model prayer that Jesus taught us to pray? It begins praising God: *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”* (Matthew 6:9). Do you know how it ends? It ends in praise: *“thine is the kingdom...the power, and glory, for ever”* (Matthew 6:13). Those are the bookends of any prayer: it begins with praise; it concludes with praise. So, put this down: praise—friend, when you praise, faith is bolstered.

II. When You Praise, Your Fears Are Banished

When you praise, fears are banished. Continue to read now in verses 4 and 5: *“I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed”* (Psalm 34:4–5).

If you were to go into the average bookstore and the section of religion, you would find, over and over again, the subject of mental health being addressed. And, many of those books are being bought by believers, and it is because those believers are preoccupied with fear. Ann Landers was asked, “Is there a common denomination in the letters that you receive?” She said, “Yes, it is the subject of fear.” Over and over again, people are...they’re put on by fear.

I know something that would greatly reduce the traffic into the psychiatrist’s office and into the psychologist’s office, and that is for people to learn something that would be very simple—and that is to praise the Lord. You see, you cannot praise God and be self-centered. Do you know why people have psychological problems and fear? It’s because they’re egocentric. And, Jesus never meant us to be egocentric. Egocentrism is a form of self-destruction; and yet, we’re being taught over and over again in America to be egocentric.

But, let me tell you what the great teacher said, the Lord Jesus. He said in Luke 9:24: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: [and] whosoever [shall] lose his life for my sake, the same shall [find] it.”* Now, the word *life* and the word *soul* are interchangeable there—*“whosoever will save his [soul]”* (Luke 9:24). And, you know what the word *soul* means? It means “psyche.” The Greek word for soul is *psyche*—*ego*. What Jesus is saying is that when you become self-centered, you begin to destruct. When you try to save your ego, yourself, your psyche, that’s when you lose it. But, when you lose yourself in praise to Him, that is when you find yourself. You see, if you’re egocentric, that’s going to cause you to be self-centered; and if you’re self-centered, something happens to your precious little self: you’re going to become defensive; and after you become defensive, you’ll become hostile; and after you become hostile, you may become aggressive. And, when you see your little world beginning to crumble, then you get filled with fear.

No one, however, can truly praise the Lord and be preoccupied with self. You cannot put your eyes upon the infinite, and holy, and wonderful God, and make your boast in Him, and keep your eyes upon your bankrupt self at the same time. But, when you put your eyes upon Him, when you praise Him, your fear will melt away. You cannot sulk and praise at the same time. You cannot be irritated and praise at the same time. You cannot be filled with fear and praise at the same time.

Tonight, before I came in, I was reading in God’s Word. I want to share a verse that I found in Isaiah chapter 61. It’s a beautiful verse. I’ve seen it before, but it came with new import to me tonight. Isaiah 61:3—look at it; it says that we are *“to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* You have a spirit of heaviness tonight? Fear will be banished as you praise the Lord. Faith is bolstered, and fears are banished.

How are you going to overcome fear? By feeling? Just laugh it off? You can’t do that. By forgetting? You can’t do that. We’ve tried that. It just... You push those fears out the front door; they run around the house and come in the basement window into the subconscious. By fighting? You’re no match for Satan. By faithing you deal with fear. Fear not. Faith answers, and fear goes.

III. When You Praise, Your Foes Are Beaten

Now, I’ll tell you a third thing that praise will do. I’m talking about the power of perpetual praise. Faith is bolstered. Fears are banished, and foes are beaten. Look, if you will, in 6 and 7 now: *“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them”* (Psalm 34:6–7). If you will not concentrate on your enemies, but if you will begin to concentrate on God and praise God, your enemies will be defeated as you

praise God. When a man's ways please the Lord, even his enemies are at peace with him. That doesn't mean that they love him or like him; it means that they're afraid to attack him—they're afraid to come against him—because he has the power of Almighty God on his life. Learn that when we praise God...

I have found this; I have seen this in so many times. You say, "Pastor Rogers, do you have any enemies?" Yes, a lot of them. There are a lot of people who don't like the stands I take. They don't like the brand of gospel I preach. Now, I can't say that I rejoice in that, but I tell you, if I have enemies because of standing up for the Word of God, then I rejoice that God has given me the grace to do that. But, I've found this: that when I focus on my enemies, I get morose. But, when I praise God, when I begin just to praise God, if somebody says something bad about me, I just take that, and I say, "Lord, I offer that to You as a praise—offer that to You as a glory," and I continue to praise the Lord. God has a way of causing those people to defeat themselves. You don't have to do it. When... It's a Bible principle.

Some time do this: take your Bible, and begin to study and see how many times in the Bible, when God's people got right and began to praise Him, God sent confusion among the enemies, and they turn on one another, and they defeat one another. And so, foes are beaten. Who is behind your foe? Your enemy is not some flesh and blood. "*We wrestle not against flesh and blood*" (Ephesians 6:12). Our real enemy is Satan. And, when you praise God, what happens? Well, when you praise God, God is especially near.

Now, God is omnipresent. That means He's always here. There's no place where God is not. But now, listen: God is dynamically present when you praise Him. May I say that again? God is omnipresent. He's always present, but God is dynamically present when you praise Him. For example, the Bible says in Psalm 22:3 that God occupies the praise of His people. If you want to write God's address down, it's just "praise"—just "praise." God dynamically moves in when we praise. Therefore, Satan is allergic to praise, because Satan is allergic to the presence of God. And, that's the reason when we meet together, and we want God to do something wonderful, and Brother Whitmire (who's not a song leader, but a worship leader and a praise leader) comes to lead us in praise, with all of your heart, and soul, and being, and every ounce and inch and nerve and fiber and sinew in you, you ought to be praising God. And, do you know what? Every demon and imp of Satan will say, "I don't like it in here. God is too much in here." And, and, and, and Satan is paralyzed, and bound, and banished when we praise God.

IV. When You Praise, Favors Are Bestowed

Why praise God? Faith is bolstered, fears are banished, foes are beaten when we praise God—and favors are bestowed. Look, if you will, in verses 8 and following now:

“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing” (Psalm 34:8–10). *“Taste and see that the LORD is good”* (Psalm 34:8). Praise is the taste buds of the soul. You want to know how good God is? Taste Him. Say, “How do I taste Him?” Praise—praise. You see, when you praise God, God responds. God reveals Himself to you as you lift your heart to Him in praise. And, when this happens, you know that God is good.

Now, suppose you tell me that God is not good. Well, you won’t convince me, because what you have is an argument; what I have is an experience.

I mean, suppose I had just eaten apple pie, and you tell me that apple pie is no good—it doesn’t taste good. I’ve got the evidence on the inside. You see, a Christian with an experience is never at the mercy of an infidel with an argument. Isn’t that true? And, you tell me that there is no such thing as apple pie, or if there is, it doesn’t taste good. I say, “Well, I’ve got the evidence on the inside.”

This is what the psalmist was saying. *“Taste”—“taste”—“and see that the LORD is good”* (Psalm 34:8). And, the taste buds of your soul, your spirit, is praise, as you praise the Lord.

Notice what he says about the lions in verse 10: *“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger”* (Psalm 34:10). What’s He saying is even the fiercest and cunning king of the beasts will howl for hunger, but a simple-minded believer who praises God has an advantage over a mighty, roaring, greedy lion.

V. When You Praise, Your Future Is Brightened

Now, here’s the final thing I want to say: not only are favors bestows and God meets your needs when you praise, but the future is brightened—the future is brightened. Notice verse 5: *“They looked upon him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed”* (Psalm 34:5). Begin to read now in verse 11: *“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desireth life, and that loveth many days, that he may see good?”* (Psalm 34:11–12). Now, isn’t that what you want? Isn’t that what you want? Say, “Amen.” *“What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?”* (Psalm 34:12). Every one of us wants that.

Well, now listen to what he says: *“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile”* (Psalm 34:13). That is, get that junk off your mouth, out of your mouth, and out of your vocabulary. *“The eyes of the LORD are among the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry”*—and he’s talking here about the prayer and the praise of God’s people—*“The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the*

remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles” (Psalm 34:15–17). What’s he saying? He’s saying that your future is made bright when you praise the Lord. *“What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?”* (Psalm 34:12).

Over there in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, there’s a story of a woman—a thirsty woman—at the well of Samaria. She was out there in the noontime—not when women normally come to draw water—because she was a social piranha; she was an outcast. But, Jesus was sitting on the curbing of that well. And, you remember that the Lord Jesus asked that woman for a drink of water. It was His device, among other things, to begin a conversation with that woman, that He might bring her to saving faith. And, He talked to her about that water of life and talked to her about having the hunger and the thirst of her soul quenched by that everlasting water. But, in the course of that conversation, He talked to her about praise and worship. She wanted to get into a denominational argument: “Should we worship God here or there?” And, Jesus said, “Listen, lady, God is a Spirit—neither in this mountain or in that mountain. But, God is a Spirit, and you must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23–24).

You know, God is seeking people to worship, seeking people to praise. You know why God is seeking people to praise? Why does God want you to praise Him? Is God an egotist? I mean, is God insecure? Does God have to have us constantly telling Him how big, and how great, and how wonderful He is? Friend, when you praise God, you can’t make Him any more glorious, because He’s all glory. When you can... When you give to Him, you can’t make Him any more wealthy. He owns everything. Well, then, why do you praise God? Not for what praise does for God, although He is worthy of our praise, but for what praise does, primarily, for you, because we become like what we worship. And, when we praise—we were created to worship—and when we praise, the deepest needs of our lives are met.

This woman had had five husbands, and now she was sleeping around, not even bothering to get married. You say, “Is that unusual?” It was in that day; it’s not in this day. Today, we’d give her an Academy Award, I guess. But, what had happened to this woman? She was going from husband to husband to husband to husband to husband, from one affair to another. Why? She was thirsty—she was a thirsty woman. She was looking for something that she could not find. And, she thought, like so many people, “I can find it in a happy marriage. If I could just get married, if I could find the right man, that man would meet my deepest needs.”

Now, I want everybody to listen to me very carefully. How many married people do we have? Let me see your hands if you’re married here tonight. That’s most of us. Now, listen to me very carefully: your husband cannot meet your deepest needs, lady. Mister,

your wife cannot meet your deepest needs. You know why people get divorced? They say, “She’s not meeting my needs.” She was never meant to—never meant to. It is God who meets your needs.

This woman was asking of her husband and her boyfriends something that they could not give and no one can give. It was Larry Crabb or someone who said that “people enter into marriage for the same reason that a tick gets on a dog: for what he can get out of it. Only trouble is, in marriage, there are two ticks and no dog.” We’re asking other people to meet our needs, to give us satisfaction. There is a need in your life, and that need is God. And, when you worship Him, then you’re going to be the kind of husband and kind of wife that you need to be, because your needs are not going to be met by that individual. Your needs are going to be met by the Almighty.

Conclusion

Why don’t you take Psalm 34, and why don’t you make it the desire of your heart and the pledge of your life? *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth”* (Psalm 34:1). And, when you don’t need anything, don’t want anything, just do what I find myself doing frequently—and I’ve been doing all day long—just saying, “Jesus, I love You—I love You. I bless You. I praise You. I give You glory.” Hallelujah! Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord. Wake up in the morning—tomorrow morning, before you get out of bed, bless Him and praise Him. Through the day, bless Him. Bless Him before other people. Let the humble hear and be glad. And, when we worship together, brothers and sisters in Christ, with all of our heart, let’s praise Him. And, when people come in here, let them feel the spirit of worship. Let’s don’t have any more “spectator-itus” on Sunday. Let’s be praising God. And, Satan won’t like it, but the Holy Spirit will. And, He’ll move in, and we’ll see God do marvelous things in our midst.

Let’s bow our heads in prayer. Father, teach us to praise. And Lord, may we praise continually, and may that praise be not only in our hearts, but on our lips. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

How to Win in the War with Worry

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 31, 1982

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 37:1–7

“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”

PSALMS 37:7

Outline

Introduction

- A. Worry Is Useless
- B. Worry Is Harmful
- C. Worry Is Contagious
- D. Worry Is a Wound in the Heart of God
- I. There Must Be a Confidence That Relies on the Lord
- II. There Must Be a Communion That Rejoices in the Lord
- III. There Must Be a Commitment That Rolls Burdens on the Lord
- IV. There Must Be a Contentment That Rests in the Lord

Conclusion

Introduction

We're talking on this subject: "How to Win in the War with Worry." Would you find, please, Psalm 37—Psalm 37? And, we're going to begin reading in verse 1—Psalms 37, verse 1: *“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”* (Psalms 37:1–7)

Now, I want to say, ladies and gentlemen, that we are in a war today. And, it is a spiritual war, and many times the battle is for the mind. And, the devil wants to intimidate you; the devil wants to harass you. And, even though you may be a child of God, he still has the ability, if you allow him to do so, to corrupt your mind. He

oppresses the children of God; he obsesses the children of God. And, many of the children of God today are going around with worries. And, they're fretting, and they're stewing, and they're in all kinds of problems because the devil is doing it. Now, the Bible here speaks of "evil workers," but I want to tell you, dear friend, that these evil workers are not your enemy, "*for we wrestle not against flesh and blood.*" (Ephesians 6:12) Your mother-in-law is not your problem. Your husband is not your problem. Your neighbors are not your problem. Your employer is not your problem. Your problem is that we are in a spiritual war, and the devil is behind your worry. And, we're going to talk today about how to win in the war with worry.

Now, you know, so many people think that, when they get saved, that'll be the end of their troubles. Friend, it will be, but it'll be the front end. Now, let me tell you something—let me tell you something: friend, if you've never met the devil, it's because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around and start to live for God—you're going to have a head-on collision with Him, amen? You see, before you got saved, you were in collusion with the devil. After you've gotten saved, you're in collision with the devil. And so, you're... He's going to see to it that you have difficulties, and he's not finished working on you. If he had the audacity to attack and tempt the Lord Jesus, don't you think, certainly, he's going to work on you, too? And so, we're going to have troubles—and not only because of this satanic attack but also just because we're part of this whole human scheme of things. You're human, and "*man [that's] born of...woman is...full of trouble.*" (Job 14:1) It doesn't make any difference whether he's saved or lost.

A young man was visiting in a rest home. He had been called to preach, but not even ordained yet—hadn't been off to seminary or anything. But, he was there. And, an elderly lady who was eighty-seven years of age, who was bedfast, said, "I want to ask you a question, young man: Are you a minister?" He said, "Yes, ma'am." Said, "Well, then, I want to ask you a question: Why am I in this condition? I've served God all of my life. I've been faithful. I went to church. I paid my tithe. I raised my children right. I lived right. I did everything that I knew to do and serve the Lord and prayed. Now, can you tell me why I am in this condition?" He said, "Yes, ma'am, I can." She said, "You can? Well, then tell me." He said, "Old age—old age." That's right.

Look, folks, we're just going to come apart sooner or later—all of us, amen? You know, that's the way we're made—that's the way we're made. Whether you're saved or whether you're lost doesn't really have all that much to do with it, friend. We're just made that way. We're a part of this human scheme of things.

A preacher friend was walking away from another friend, and this friend said to him, "Well, so long. Love God, hate sin, and watch out for trucks." It's good advice—good advice: "Love God, hate sin, and look out for trucks." They hurt if they hit you. It doesn't

matter whether you're saved or lost, friend; a truck will hurt you. Now, when you—when you—cross the road, just watch out for trucks. I mean, sure, love God. Yes, hate sin. But, I want to tell you, friend: you are human, and because you are human, there are certain things going to happen to you that could happen to anybody if you just find yourself in that particular situation. And so, people are prone to worry.

Now, this Bible says, “*Fret not.*” (Psalm 37:1, 7) That’s a command. I suppose, perhaps, it’s the most broken command in all of the Bible—the one that tells us not to fret, the one that tells us not to worry. It seems to be America’s favorite indoor sport. We worry because the Stock Market’s up or the Stock Market’s down, the interest rates are up or the interest rates are down, our blood pressure is up or our blood pressure is down. We just seem to worry and fret about so many kinds of things. The ignorant fret because they don’t know enough. Those who are intelligent fret because they know so much. The poor man frets because he doesn’t have any money. The rich man frets because he’s afraid everybody is going to get his. The old person frets because they’re facing death, and the young person frets because they’re facing an uncertain future. And, we just, all of us, tend to worry, and it doesn’t make any difference who we are. And yet, did you know that Jesus Christ had more to say about worry, and about anxiety, and about fret, and about fear than any other subject? Did you know that—that He constantly was warning us about not worrying?

A. **Worry Is Useless**

Now, why? Why should we not fret? Well, friend, the best thing we can say about it is that it’s absolutely useless. Jesus said, “*Which of you by taking [anxious] thought can add one cubit [to] his stature?*” (Matthew 6:27) It does no good. Worrying never solved a problem. Worry never lifted a burden. Worry never dried a tear. The best thing you can say about it is that it’s useless.

B. **Worry Is Harmful**

But, wait a minute—it is more than useless; it is absolutely harmful. It... There are few forms of dissipation that will harm you more than fretting and worrying. Now, we look down our long noses at those who dissipate by drugs, and alcohol, and nicotine, and these other things, but let me tell you something, friend. Are you a worrywart? You are dissipating your body, your soul. Listen, it will do the same thing to you that sand will do to machinery. It’s harmful to you.

C. **Worry Is Contagious**

And, not only is it harmful to you; it’s harmful to others. Did you know that worry is contagious? I mean, there are people who just go around spreading gloom, and when they walk into a room, it seems like somebody turned the lights out. Do you know what

I'm talking about? They are just full of moan, and groan, and trouble. They look like an advanced agent for the undertaker. They can think up things to worry about. You get behind them sometimes when you drive, and they expect every green light to turn red. And, by the time they get there, it has. Do you ever get behind a person like that? They are just naturally born that way. They, see, they tend to worry. Wouldn't it be great if we could quarantine them and put them all in one room together and let them worry one another and let the rest of us go? Worry is contagious. Not only is it harmful to the one who's doing it, but it's harmful to those around.

D. **Worry Is a Wound in the Heart of God**

But listen, that's not the greatest harm of worry. Worry is a wound in the heart of God. Worry is a disgrace to God. Worry is a way of saying, "Lord, you're not able" or "Lord, you tell a lie, and you will not take care of your blood-bought children." You know, He said that He cares for us. He's going to take care of us. He's going to meet every need. But, when we worry, we say, "God, I don't believe that."

Suppose you were to come home—and, those of you who have little children in your home—to find your daughter, your son, off in a corner sniffing and crying, hands trembling, face blanched with fear, eyes red from weeping. And, the little thing is trembling like a little bird in a storm, and you say, "Darling, what's wrong? Did somebody hurt you? What's wrong, dear?" "No." "Well, what's wrong?" "Well, I was just wondering, are we going to have anything to eat tonight and tomorrow? Maybe we're going to starve to death." "No, darling, you're not going to starve. Daddy's going to take care of you. Momma's fixing supper." "But, maybe we won't have a bed to sleep in tonight." "No, darling, we'll have a bed. We'll have a place to stay." "Maybe I won't have clothes to wear to school tomorrow." "No, darling, Daddy will see to it that you have clothes." I mean, wouldn't it be a wound in your heart if day after day your child did not have enough confidence in you as a father or as a mother that you would meet and take care of their needs? And indeed, we're human, and indeed, in some ways, we may fail. But, what a worry—what a grief—it must be to the heart of God when we act like God cannot feed us, and God cannot clothe us, and God cannot house us. What an insult it is to the heart of our great God. And so, the Bible says clearly and plainly, "*Fret not*"—"*fret not.*" (Psalms 37:1, 7)

But, you see, it's one thing for God to tell us not to do something; it's quite another thing to know how not to do the thing that we're not to do. And, behind every command of God is the omnipotent power of God to carry out that command. And so, when God tells us in verse 1 negatively not to fret, then He tells us four ways positively that we can fulfill this command that He's placed upon us. And, I want you to look at these four positive commands that are here. Now, in Psalms 37, verse 3, He says, "*Trust in the*

LORD.” (Psalms 37:3) And then, in verse 4, He says, *“Delight thyself also in the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:4) In verse 5, He says, *“Commit thy way unto the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:5) And, in verse 7, He says, *“Rest in the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:7) And, that’s the way, dear friend, to win the war over worry. How beautifully God gives it to us! Now, let’s go back and look at each of those four commandments, shall we?

I. There Must Be a Confidence That Relies on the Lord

First of all, dear friend, there is a confidence—there must be a confidence—that relies on the Lord. In verse 3, look at it: *“Trust in the LORD, and do good; [and] so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”* (Psalms 37:3) A confidence that relies on the Lord.

Now, this word *trust* is an interesting word. It roots from a word that means “to lie facedown on the ground.” Now, what does that got to do with trust? Well, the idea is here’s a person who’s totally helpless, just—he’s been cast down. He has nothing to stand upon. As we would say, “his pins have gone out from underneath him.” There he is, facedown on the ground, utterly, totally helpless and dependent. He has no visible means of support. Now, that’s the place that God wants us to bring—wants to bring us—to, so, when we have no physical means of support, no visible means of support, no outer means of support, no way out, that we simply trust in the Lord. As a matter of fact, did you know that God will sometimes maneuver you to bring you into that place where God Himself will knock your feet out from beneath you and that God will place you, as it were, facedown on the ground so that you might learn to trust Him? You see, God wants us to trust Him, so sometimes He puts us in His school.

You remember how God was leading the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and into the Promised Land? And, as He led them out of Egypt, He led them into a, well, what we would think is almost a trap, a cul-de-sac, a pocket. They were being led along, and they come to this place. They come up against the Red Sea, and here’s the Red Sea here. And, on this side are the mountains, and on that side are the mountains. And, they are led right to that place. Now, it wasn’t that Moses couldn’t read a map. God led them there. The Bible makes it very clear: they were there because that God led them there.

Why did God lead them there? Well, God was teaching them. The Bible says all of these things were just sort of a boot camp for them. God was giving them training; and so, God led them to the Red Sea. And then, God says, “Go forward.” There’s the sea. Well, they say, “Well, sure, Lord, as soon as we get a boat, build a boat, build a bridge. Where’s the bridge? We’ll go forward.” “No, just go forward.” “You mean, right...” “Yeah, right forward.” “Well, no, ah...” They weren’t so keen about that. But, I’ll tell you, God encouraged them a little bit, because as they looked backward, they saw a cloud of dust, and here came the Egyptians—Pharaoh with blood in his eye, his sword glittering

in the sun, and all of the Egyptian army. This host of Egyptians are coming. And so, now they decide that they'll go forward. And, they go forward, because there's nothing else they can do.

You see, God sometimes brings us to a place where faith is not an option; it's not a luxury—it is a necessity. Sometimes God will maneuver you to where you are just absolutely helpless; you're facedown on the ground. And, if you don't—if you don't—trust God, friend, you've had it. I mean, there's nothing else you can do but trust God, and that's not a good—a bad—place to be; that, indeed, may be a very good place to be, and God will teach you that.

You know what Paul said in Philippians chapter 4, verse 11? He said, "I've learned to be content in whatever state I'm in." (Philippians 4:11) Now, you know what that word *content* means? It means...it has the idea of being self-contained. That is, I have learned that I don't need anything or anybody else but the Lord. I have Him, and, therefore, I'm self-contained—not self-sufficient; I am self-contained. He went on to say, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" (Philippians 4:13) You see, the context of this is he was thanking them for their love gift to him. And, they'd helped support his ministry, and he said, "Boy," he said, "I sure thank you for that. That was mighty fine that you did that"—"*[but] not that I speak in respect of want*" (Philippians 4:11)—that is, "not that I am dependent upon you." He said, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be [self-contained]. I [have learned] how to be abased, and...to abound...[how] to be full and...to suffer need, [how to be hungry and how to have plenty to eat].*" (Philippians 4:11–12) He said, "I've learned it all."

Now, how did he learn it? Did he read it somewhere in a book? No, God brought him to this place, and God said, "Paul, I'm going to put you in a place, and I'm going to take everything away from you. And then, I'm going to show you in that place, Paul, that I can meet your need." And, he said, "I've learned—I've learned, I've learned—that I can do all things through Christ who is pouring His life into me." (Philippians 4:13) And, God sometimes, my friend, will lead you into that place, that He might prove Himself to you.

You see, we need this. I mean, how do you know you're really trusting the Lord? I want to ask you a question today: What—what, really—is giving you joy today? What's making you happy? "Well," you say, "the Lord is making me happy." How can you be sure? How do you know it's not that nice automobile you came to church in this morning that's making you happy? How do you know it's not your home that's making you happy? How do you know it's not those friends that are sitting around you this morning that's giving you your joy? How do you know it's not that fine breakfast you had this morning? You say, "I know that. I didn't have one." All right, how do—how do, how do you—know what it is? How do you know it's not your bank account? How do you know it's not your job? How do you know it's not your social esteem and all of these things

that's making you happy? I mean, how do you know that the Lord is the strength of your life and that the Lord is what's making you happy?

Well, I tell you how you can know it: by the process of elimination. Let God take away your automobile, and if you still have joy, then that wasn't the source of your joy, amen? Let God take away your health, and if you still have joy, then that wasn't the source of your joy. Let God take away your home, and if you still have joy, then that wasn't the source of your joy. Let God take away your job, and if you still have joy, then that wasn't the source of your joy. My dear friend, if you lose your joy when you lose any of those things, you are an idolater—you are an idolater—because that's where you're getting your joy. I don't mean that you could not be temporarily upset about those things. But, if the joy goes out of your life, that means you weren't getting your joy from the Lord; you were getting your joy in these things. And so, what God will do to us sometimes is this: He'll just put us facedown on the ground before Him when there's nothing else—I mean, just Him. He'll teach us to learn to be self-contained—not self-sufficient; self-contained. And, He'll teach you that in whatever state you are, no matter what they take away from you, therewith to be self-contained, to be content, to be facedown on the ground before the Lord.

Now listen, we say, "Jesus is all I need." Well, you know, how you can prove that? God will bring you to a place where Jesus is all you have. Now listen, you'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got. And, it may be that Jesus will just bring you to that place where He's all you've got, and then you'll find out that not only is Jesus necessary; He's enough—He's enough—and that you will find your joy in the Lord. Trust in the Lord.

Now, when you trust Him, what does He say? "*Trust in the LORD, and do good.*" (Psalms 37:3) Do you know one of the signs that you're not trusting the Lord is you cease to function? You cease to function; you just sort of drop out. You let somebody start to worry, you let somebody start to fret, you let somebody get distressed, oppressed of the devil—do you know what they do? They close shop. They cave in. They sit around the house. They draw the drapes, watch television, read papers, go to sleep, get up late. They just don't—they don't—want to function. They just get a blue mood. Have you ever been that way? Depression will do that to you. Now, let me tell you something, friend: when you are acting that way, it's because you're not trusting the Lord. You're fretting, and you cease to do good. But, when you trust in the Lord, then you do good. You do those things... You say, "I lost my job." Well, what are you doing? You say, "Well, I'm just sitting around the house." Well, quit it. You have more opportunity now to serve God. Come down here to the church and say, "Put me to work." Get out there and do something for that widow neighbor that needs help. Cut her grass. Cut somebody else's grass. Paint a house. Do good—do good, do good—

because you're trusting the Lord.

Now, let me give you just a paraphrase of this thing: He's saying, "You do good where I've put you"—*"so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily [you'll] be fed."* (Psalms 37:3) ("You just operate in the place where you find yourself, and I'm going to take care of your needs.") Have you ever noticed that there, along with the command in the Bible not to worry, there comes, so many times, that, correspondingly, there comes the same God's promise to take care of us? One of the most frequent promises in the Bible is that we're going to be fed—that God's going to take care of our needs.

Let me give you an example of one. Matthew chapter 6, verse 33: *"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33) That's God's Word. *"[Trust] ye"*—*"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33) Now, why did God promise us that? And, why does God encourage us that way? So that we'll not starve? No, that's not it. Friend, a lot of people who don't trust the Lord don't starve. I mean, I can show you people all over Memphis here who are not seeking first the kingdom of God. They've got a big house, pantry full of food, fine clothes. As a matter of fact, many times they have more than God's people have, don't they? They really do. I mean, they've got it, and they're not trusting the Lord. So, is this why we seek the Lord with all of our heart—in order that we might not starve? No, that's not the idea.

Let me tell you what an unsaved man does: his whole mind is wrapped up in these things. You see, Jesus said, *"After...these things do the Gentiles seek."* (Matthew 6:32) The Gentiles seek these things. Now, the word *Gentile* is...well, the best translation we would have is "pagan," "heathens." "After these things the pagans are seeking." (Matthew 6:32) Do you know what the average unsaved man is thinking about in Memphis, Tennessee? Money, homes, cars, clothes, family, food, jewelry, finery—he's seeking these things. I mean, his whole life is consumed in these things. Now, the Bible knows and Jesus knows that we have a one-track mind. *"No man can serve two masters."* (Matthew 6:24) And so, if these are the things that you're seeking, you're not seeking the Lord. But, so, the Bible says, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matthew 6:33) What He wants to do—what God is doing, ladies and gentlemen, is saying, "You trust me. Bring all of your attention into trusting me and doing good, and I'll take care of you." And, the reason He gives us that promise is to allow us to concentrate in Him. Just simply do good. Now, dear friend, this is what God wants for you: He wants you to have a one-track mind. And, if you have been attending to worry today, God first says there must be a confidence that relies on the Lord—a confidence that relies on the Lord.

II. There Must Be a Communion That Rejoices in the Lord

Now, secondly—secondly—there must be a communion that rejoices in the Lord. Look, if you will now, in verse 4: *“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”* (Psalms 37:4) Number one: a confidence that relies on the Lord. Number two: a communion that rejoices in the Lord. Look—look at it again: *“Delight thyself...in the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:4)

Now, why do we worry? What causes us to worry? I'll tell you what causes the average person to worry: when the thing that gives him joy is threatened. I mean, if the thing that you get your satisfaction from is threatened, then you're going to begin to worry. For example, if you get your greatest joy from your job and your job is threatened, then you're going to fret. If you get your greatest joy from your possessions and your possessions are threatened, then you're going to fret. If you get your greatest joy from your family, as fine as that may be, and your family is threatened, you're going to fret. You see, what He's saying is that you need to get something that cannot be touched, something that cannot be taken from you, and, therefore, that your joy might be full and that your joy might remain, something that cannot be threatened. Now, that, of course, is the Lord. He doesn't change. If you get your joy from your children, friend, they can grow up and move off—move to California and write you once a year. Or, I don't mean to be somber, but they can die. If you get your joy from your wealth, it can be taken from you. If you get your joy from your home, it can be destroyed. You get your joy from your job, you can be fired. You get your... Well, you say, “Well, I just get a joy out of living.” You can die—you can die.

Now, what I'm trying to say is, dear friend, that, what do you have that cannot be touched? The Lord. *“Delight [yourself] in the LORD”*—and then, what does He say?—*“and...the desires”*—*“he [will] give [you] the desires of [your] heart.”* (Psalms 37:4) Now, what does that mean? Does that mean you have anything you want? Does it mean all I have to do is love God and then I'll get a swimming pool, and a bigger house, and a fine car, and a vacation to Monaco? Is that what it means? No, that's not what He's talking about at all. He's not talking about your surface wants. He's not talking about your casual wishes. He says, *“[You] delight [yourself] in the LORD: and he [will] give [you] the [desire] of [your] heart.”* (Psalms 37:4) That is, your innermost needs will be met—your innermost needs will be met, the desire of your heart.

And, what is the desire of your heart? To know God. What are your innermost needs? To know the Lord. In Him you'll find what you've been searching for, what you've been seeking for. And, when you delight yourself in the Lord, then you're going to find, for the first time, your real needs are going to be met. I'm telling you, there are people with big cars, and fine homes, and big jobs, and bank accounts who are not happy and they are not fret-free. They have worries and cares, and sometimes they're

worrying about these very things they have and these very things that they do. But, what you need to do is to have a source of joy that cannot be touched, that cannot be eroded, and that source of joy is the Lord.

You see, God is not finished with you. God is not finished with you until you find your greatest joy in Him alone. And friend, I want to tell you something: He's going to keep giving you the test until you pass it, hmm? I mean, He doesn't flunk anybody out. And so, if you don't pass it this time, He'll just run you through again. He'll just bring you right to the Red Sea again, and He'll just teach you—I mean, to where you say, "Lord, I'm going to be facedown on the ground before you. I am going to have a confidence that relies upon you, and I'm going to have a communion that rejoices in you."

The Stock Market, in 1929, crashed. People were doing swan dives out of windows. I mean, they're committing suicide because the Stock Market went down. Obviously, they got their joy in the Stock Market. Obviously, that's where their life was. And, when that was taken away, their life...there was no more reason to live. Well, I want to tell you, friend, that Jesus is a wonderful reason to live, and God is not finished with your life until your chief delight is in the Lord. He's working on you to bring you to this place to where there will be in you a communion that delights in the Lord and you find out that not only is Jesus necessary, but Jesus is enough.

You know, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 34—it speaks of some Christians there, and it says that they rejoiced in the spoiling of their goods. (Hebrews 10:34) They rejoiced when their goods were spoiled. That is, how would you feel today if the communists took over our country and they closed our church and then went to your house and backed up a big truck and just started taking your furniture, your clothes, everything you had, and just moved it out and put it in that truck? Didn't even give you a receipt—just drove off with it. Could you rejoice? Well, these early Christians did. They rejoiced. They took gladly, joyfully, the spoiling of their goods. (Hebrews 10:34)

You see, the devil said to Job—or, excuse me, the devil said to God—"That man Job down there—the only reason, God, he serves you is because all these things you've given him." (Job 1:9–10) God said, "You don't know Job. I've given him these things because I love him, but you don't know Job. You take those things from him—he'll still love me; he'll still serve me." The devil said, "He'll curse you." God said, "No, he won't." God says, "No, he won't." God brought Job to the place—the devil brought Job to the place—where he had nothing but just God. And, old Job said, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust...him.*" (Job 13:15) You see, this is what God wants to do to you: He wants to bring you to a place where you delight in Him—and Him completely and fully.

It's not wrong to have joy in your family. I'm not saying that. I'm not saying it's not wrong to appreciate your possessions. I'm not saying that. But friend, I—Joyce and I—

came to a place a long time ago where we made a solemn vow one to the other that we were not going to get upset over the loss of any physical, material thing. I mean, that's, in a sense, it's an insult to God; it's a form of idolatry. And so, we are to delight in the Lord—not in the things the Lord gives us, but in the Lord. And, the joy of the Lord is to be our strength. (Nehemiah 8:10) Do you know this? Have you—have you—learned to hold the things of this world loosely? You can tell a lot about a person by what makes him sad, by what makes him glad, and by what makes him mad, amen? Now, when a man has his joy in the Lord, the things that move other people about him—blow about other people about him—are not going to move you about and blow you about to that same degree.

III. There Must Be a Commitment That Rolls Burdens on the Lord

Now, the third thing—the third thing. Now, what's He say? First of all, *“trust in the LORD”* (Psalms 37:3): there must be a commitment that relies upon the Lord. Secondly, *“delight...in the LORD”* (Psalms 37:4): there must be a communion that rejoices in the Lord. Now thirdly, there must be a commitment that rolls burdens on the Lord. A confidence in the Lord, a communion with the Lord, and a commitment to the Lord.

Look, if you will, in verse 5: *“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”* (Psalms 37:5) Now, this word *commit* literally means “to roll,” or it has the idea of rolling. It means “to roll your burden on the Lord.” We sing that little chorus: “Rolled away, rolled away, rolled away, every burden on my heart rolled away.” That's a good chorus. Or, we say, “Roll your burdens upon the Lord.” That's exactly what we're to do—roll your burden on the Lord.

Now, look at that word *way*—the word *way*: *“Commit [your] way...”* (Psalms 37:5) That means—that means—“a well-traveled path.” We could almost say your lifestyle, your way of living, your reputation, the way you do things, what people think about you, how people conceive of you. Just give that to the Lord. You see, another thing that causes us to fret is this: we're worried about what people think about us. Oh, you let somebody say something bad about people and criticize their lifestyle—the way they do things—they get all upset about it. They don't like to be criticized. We need to be like Peter Lord. Peter Lord told me, “When anybody says anything bad about me, I just say, ‘Thank God they don't know any more.’” Amen? That—“thank God they don't know more about me.” But, we don't like to be criticized. But, you see, what the Lord says is, “Look, when they criticize you, you delight in me; you trust in me. Then, let them criticize.” Just roll it on the Lord, and God says, “I'll take care of you.”

Look in verse 6. You don't have to protect your reputation. Look in verse 6: *“And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.”* (Psalms 37:6) Now, you know, most of us—we're so protective over what people think

of us. I know of preachers who have lost their children to the world, the flesh, and the devil because they were so concerned about what people thought rather than about what God thought. And, maybe they're raising a teenager, and that teenage boy is going through some of the problems that sometimes teenagers do. And, he wants to grow his hair a little long, or he wants to do something like he ought not to do, perhaps, and live a little lifestyle. And, the daddy says, "Now Son, you can't do that now. What will the people think?" And, mother is mortified and humiliated, and they're so concerned about what other people are going to think rather than about what they ought to do through God for that boy—and love him and stay by his side through that problem. And, they sacrifice him upon the altar of their reputation rather than just simply trusting the Lord and rolling that thing upon the Lord.

You say, "Well, the WMU might talk." Let them talk. "My neighbor might criticize." Let them criticize. God knows your heart. That's your child; that's your son. And, you do what you need to do under God the best way you can do it, and roll it on the Lord. He'll bring forth your righteousness, your judgment. (Psalms 37:6) You see, sometimes we need not to be so concerned about what other people are saying, what other people think about you, and how other people criticize you. Don't you worry about that, and don't you fret about that. You get your heart right with God. Just roll it on the Lord. He'll take care of it. Just tell God about it. Don't worry about it. Listen, roll your burden on the Lord.

Now, what He's saying—listen, folks; listen—don't fret. Have a confidence that relies on the Lord. You'll be fed. Have a communion that delights in the Lord. You'll never be disappointed. Have a commitment that rolls burdens on the Lord. He'll take care of you. He'll vindicate you. He'll answer. You just do right.

IV. There Must Be a Contentment That Rests in the Lord

Now, the fourth and final thing I want you to see: You're to have a contentment—a contentment—that rests in the Lord. Look, if you will now, in verse 7 of this psalm: "*Rest in the LORD*"—now, you can't rest until you're contented. A contentment that rests in the Lord—"*and wait patiently for him*" (Psalms 37:7)—a contentment that rests in the Lord.

Now friend, this word *rest* literally means "to be silent." You know what we do—we're always badgering the Lord, always talking to the Lord: "And now, now Lord, why did you do this?" Questioning the Lord: "Lord, why did you do that?" Criticizing the Lord—murmuring, complaining, griping, criticizing, questioning. God says, "Shut up! Wait on me. Shut up! Wait on me." "*Rest in the LORD*"—be silent before Him—"*and wait patiently [on] him.*" (Psalms 37:7)

Now, we don't like that word *rest*, do we? We want God to hurry up. We want God to

do it yesterday. The Lord says, *“Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious [to] you.”* (Isaiah 30:18) I want to tell you something, friend: God is not interested in time; He’s interested in timing—in timing. You know, God does everything in the fullness of time, when it’s ready. Now, we want Him to do it right away; and so, we’re always running around pulling our radishes up by the roots and then cramming them back in the ground, wanting to see how they’re growing. But listen, friend, that’s not God’s way. We just let God bring things into full fruition. You’re not going to hurry God up. God’s never in a hurry. God is never late. And, we must learn how to shut up, and let God work, and just simply rest in the Lord, and lean back and watch God do what He’s doing.

Now, the Bible says that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord and a day as a thousand years. (2 Peter 3:8) Now, we can understand the first part, but when we’re waiting on God to do something, it seems like, to us, that a day is as a thousand years. I mean, we’re just saying, “God, why have you been so long? Why do you wait so long?” But, the Bible says, *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.”* (Psalms 37:7) *“Wait, I say, [upon] the LORD.”* (Psalms 27:14)

You know, I like Psalms 30 and verse 5. And there, it talks about having trouble, but it says that *“weeping may endure for a [season]”*—that is, for a night—*“but joy [comes] in the morning.”* (Psalms 30:5) Now, God allows us to have these night seasons, these dark seasons, these blue seasons. He allows us to do that. *“Weeping [endures] for a [season]”*—for a nighttime—*“but joy [comes] in the morning.”* (Psalms 30:5) And, what He says is this: that waiting on the Lord is like waiting for the sun to come up. Now listen, friend, if you get up tomorrow morning to see the sun rise, I want to tell you what not to do: don’t try to make it hurry up. You can’t do it—you can’t do it. I mean, you can get a brass band, some cheerleaders, but it’s not going to come up any sooner. Waiting on the Lord is like waiting for the sun to come up: you cannot hurry it. But, I’ll tell you something else: you can’t stop it. It will come up—it will come up. And, God is going to bring a sunrise to your soul.

Did you hear about the man who sat up one night all night wondering where the sun went and finally it dawned on him? Let me tell you something, friend: you may be perplexed all night—say, “What has happened to me?” But, I want to tell you that God is going to turn your Calvary to an Easter, and God is going to turn every hurt to a hallelujah, and God is going to turn every tear to a pearl, and God is going to bring a sunrise to your soul. *“Weeping may endure for a [season], but joy cometh in the morning.”* (Psalms 30:5) *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.”* (Psalms 37:7) And, if you do it, you’re going to fulfill the command that says to fret not, and you’re going to win in this war over worry—not you, but the Lord. Have you noticed the key to all of these? *“Trust in the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:3) *“Delight...in the LORD.”* (Psalms 37:4)

“Commit [your] way [to] the LORD.” (Psalms 37:5) “Rest in the LORD.” (Psalms 37:7)
And, who is the Lord? Jesus is Lord—Jesus is Lord. Trust in Jesus. Love Jesus.
Commit your life to Jesus. Rest in Jesus, who said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28)

Conclusion

Let’s pray together. Father, we pray in the name of Jesus. And Lord, you teach us to fret not, but, O God, to find our joys—our delights—in you alone. And Lord, sometimes that it just may be that we’ll just be facedown on the ground before you, nothing else to cling to. But Lord, we’ll say, *“Though he slay me, yet [shall] I trust...him.”* (Job 13:15) And, though we have nothing else, Lord, we have you, and you’re enough—and more than enough. And Lord, I just pray today for those in my radio audience, and those in the television audience, and those in this place who have been attacked by Satan and, Lord God, that they might learn to trust in you and to win the war with worry. In Jesus’s name. Amen.

Too Blessed to Be Stressed

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 15, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 37:1–7

“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.”

PSALMS 37:1

Outline

Introduction

- A. Worry Is Useless
- B. Worry Is Harmful
 - 1. Worry Will Harm You
 - 2. Worry Will Harm Others
 - 3. Worry Will Harm God

- I. Trust in the Lord When Resources Vanish
- II. Delight in the Lord When Dreams Dissolve
- III. Commit Your Way to the Lord When Your Lifestyle is Threatened
- IV. Rest in the Lord When God Seems Slow to Act

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and find Psalm 37? I was saying to some this morning that I was getting on an airplane, and a skycap was there. And, I like to be good friends to the skycaps. They give me better service when I’m nice to them, and I want to be nice to them just for Jesus’s sake anyway. And, I said to one of them—I said, “How’s your day been going?” He looked me straight in the eye with a grin about a mile wide, and he said, “I am too blessed to be stressed.” And, I thought, “Man, I like that. I’m gonna use that as a sermon title.” So, I’m gonna borrow his words and make that the title of my sermon tonight—“Too Blessed to be Stressed.”

I was reading *U.S. News & World Report*—and talking about the mental stress that’s in our nation today. And, I’m not gonna read the report to you, but I want to read what Dr. Randall Marshall, Director of the Trauma Studies in New York State Psychiatric Institute, said: he said, “We are having”—“we are having”—“powerful and disabling problems.” Now, he’s talking about the situation we’re in right now. He said, “We are seeing a relapse in panic, in depression, and in psychosis.” Now, that’s going on in the hearts of lots of people.

And yet, the scripture tells us, as we're going to see, that we're not to fret. If you ever had a psalm that dealt with Osama Bin Laden, it's this one right here. Look at it—Psalm 37, verse 1: *“Fret not thyself because of evildoers”*—there it is—*“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; [and] so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him”* (Psalm 37:1–7).

Now, the Bible tells us—as a matter of fact, the Bible commands us—not to fret, but I'm sorry to tell you that many Americans and not a few Christians fret. When the stock market goes down, our blood pressure goes up. The ignorant fret because they don't know enough; the educated fret because they know too much. The poor fret because they don't have any money; the rich fret because they're afraid they're gonna lose what they have. The old fret because they're facing death; the young fret because they're facing an unsure future. And yet, God says to *“fret not”* (Psalm 37:1).

The Lord Jesus—and we're gonna come back to Psalm 37 in a moment—but the Lord Jesus warned against worry and fretting.

A. **Worry Is Useless**

The best thing you can say about worry is that it's useless. He says, “Which of you by taking an anxious thought can add one cubit to his stature?” (Matthew 6:27; Luke 12:25). It's the most useless thing around. It does no good. You don't gain anything by worry. Some think that they do. Little lady said, “Don't tell me that worry does no good; most of the things I worry about never happen.” Jesus said, “Take no anxious thought for the morrow” (Matthew 6:34). The best you can say about it is, “Hey, it's useless.”

B. **Worry Is Harmful**

But, if it were only useless, then we wouldn't be so concerned about it. But, it is so harmful.

1. **Worry Will Harm You**

Worry will do the same thing to you that sand will do to machinery. It'll take all of the blue out of your sky. It'll take all of the joy out of your heart. Have you ever thought about what worry does to you? Few forms of dissipation are as debilitating as worry.

2. **Worry Will Harm Others**

But, not only does fretting harm you; it harms others. I mean, there are people who just go around spreading gloom. I know people who can brighten up a room by leaving it. I

mean, these are folks who just... It's a form of contagion—these people who worry. And, you don't dare ask them how they feel; friend, they'll tell you.

3. Worry Will Harm God

But, have you ever thought about how harmful worry is to God? Suppose I came home when my children were little, and I saw them in the corner sitting there, whimpering and sniveling, whining, trembling. I said, “Dears, what’s wrong?” They said, “Well, Daddy, we’re afraid we’re not gonna have food to eat tomorrow. We’re worried that we’re not gonna have a bed to sleep in. We’re not gonna have any clothes to wear, and Daddy, we’re worried.” Well, I want to ask you a question: How would that make me feel as a father, as the provider, as the protector, to have my children, my very own children, crying, weeping, trembling because they evidently would think I’m not able to take care of them? Well, I’m only human. Truth of the matter is, perhaps I would not be able to take care of them. I’d hate to think that. But, what an insult to God that worry is! Worry is a way of saying, “God, You’re not able—You’re not able—to provide for me.”

This same psalm—David said, “Once I was young. Now I am old, yet I’ve not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalm 37:25). God’s Word says, “*Fret not*” (Psalm 37:1). Well, that’s one thing for God to say it, but how to do it—that’s the other thing. And, thank God, not only do we have the command; we have the recipe and the power. So, let me give you God’s recipe—how to be too blessed to be stressed. Now, what we’re talking about is not the subtraction of problems; what we’re talking about is the addition of power. And, in the verses that I read to you, there are four commands, and I want to write these commands upon your heart and get them out of the Word of God into your heart.

I. Trust in the Lord When Resources Vanish

Number one: You need to trust in the Lord when resources vanish. Look in verse 3: “*Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*” (Psalm 37:3). Now, this word *trust* is an interesting word; it’s a Hebrew word that literally has in its root idea the idea of being face down on the ground with no visible means of support.

I have a preacher friend who was in Los Angeles with me; we were at the Southern Baptist Convention. My preacher friend, whose name is Joe Boatwright, went out for a morning walk there on the streets of Los Angeles, and he said he heard an automobile come roaring up with a broken muffler. There were about four or five young men in that car. He was on a lonely stretch of road. It was early in the morning. He was going down for a cup of coffee. Before he could say anything, those young men had jumped out of that automobile, and he found himself looking into the barrel of a gun. They had a gun right in his face, and they said, “Get down on the ground now, and spread your arms

out.” He lay down on the ground. Here are those standing over him with a revolver in the hand. He did not know what moment the trigger may be squeezed. And, they reached in, and they got his billfold—said, “Don’t you lift your head until we’re gone, or we’ll kill you.” And, he heard that old rattletrap car roar off. Now, when he was face down on the ground with no means of support, he’s illustrating what this word here literally means. It literally means “to have your feet out from beneath you, to be face down, to have no support whatsoever—no visible means of support.”

Now friend, when you get in a situation like that, there’s only one thing you can do, and that’s to trust—that’s to trust. Now, you see, most of us have never really been in that kind of a situation, and most of us have never really learned to trust in that kind of a situation, because somehow we see some options. But, you know, sometimes God puts us in a place where we don’t have any options. I mean, the only thing we can do is trust.

God taught Israel to trust that way. When God was bringing them out of the land of Egypt into the Promised Land, they came down into a cul-de-sac. There’s the Red Sea in front of them, the mountains on either side of them, Pharaoh’s army coming behind them with their swords glittering in the air and blood in their eye. And, God says, “Moses...speak [to] the children of Israel, that they go forward” (Exodus 14:15). You know what they did? They marched into the Red Sea, and God opened up a 48-lane super highway for them to go through.

But now, wait a minute. I want you to imagine them there without Pharaoh’s army, and God says, “Go forward.” They say, “Well, as soon as we see the bridge, as soon as you see the boat, as soon as the boats come, then we’ll go forward.” But you see, there comes a time, sometimes, when we don’t have any object—I mean, we don’t have any...we don’t have any alternative; we just simply have to trust.

That’s what the Apostle Paul learned about trusting the Lord. Put in your margins “Philippians 4, verses 11 and 12.” Now, Paul is in prison; he’s in a Philippian prison awaiting, perhaps, a death sentence, and here’s what he says in Philippians 4, 11 and 12: he said, “*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*”—“I have learned it”—“*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things [I’m] instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*” (Philippians 4:11–12).

Now, he says, “I’ve learned in whatsoever state I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11). The word *content* is a Greek word this time that means “self-contained, to have everything that I need within me, to be content, to be self-contained, not dependent upon any other resource except what I have on the inside.” Now, I didn’t say, “self-sufficient”; I said, “self-contained.” In the next verse, he says, in Philippians 4, verse 13: “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Philippians 4:13). The literal translation—“*I can do all things through Christ [who is pouring His life into] me*”

(Philippians 4:13).

Now, Paul said, “I have learned this.” How did he know it? Did he get this kind of trust by reading a book? Did he get this time of trust by listening to Adrian preach, or listening to a sermon in his day? How do you learn this kind of trust? You learn it when you’re at the Red Sea. You learn it when in prison. You learn it when you’re walking down the street, and a car roars up, and somebody puts a gun on you and you’re lying face down. There’s nothing else you can do but trust. Now friend, listen to me: there comes a time, sometimes, when we don’t...we have nowhere to go except to the Lord. But, when you learn that Jesus is all you have, you’ll learn that Jesus is enough—Jesus is enough. Paul was saying, “*I can do all things through Christ*” (Philippians 4:13). He’s just simply saying, “Jesus is all I need.”

Now, look at this verse again in Psalm 37. Notice what he says: “*Trust in the LORD, and do good*” (Psalm 37:3). I was so grateful that General John Slingluff said, “Don’t close in. Don’t hunker down. Don’t retreat.” Go about your lifestyle. Do good. You know what people who fret and worry do? They close down shop. They withdraw. They hunker down. What Paul is saying is this—or, what David is saying: “*Trust in the LORD, and do good*” (Psalm 37:3). That’s the best function: go ahead and stay busy.

I was, yesterday, in Seattle, Washington. I spoke at a Promise Keeper’s Rally yesterday morning in Seattle, Washington. And, there in Seattle, a great number of people have just recently been laid off; they don’t have work. Well, what can they do? Sit around and fret? No! Go out, and do good. Let me tell you, if you don’t have a job, don’t sit home in your La-Z-Boy or Barcalounger watching television and Oprah. Sounds like there’s a difference, doesn’t it? Probably is. Don’t do that. Get busy. Go do something. You say, “I don’t have a job.” Listen, you go to somebody and say, “Look, I need work.” “Well, we’re not hiring.” “That’s all right. Listen, do you mind if I just come and work for you for nothing?” “What?” “Yeah, can I just show up here? I’ll work for you for nothing.” “You’ll work for me for nothing?” “Yes! I won’t get in your way. I’ll work for you for nothing.” Friend, you do that—before long, you’ll have a job, I guarantee you. “*Trust in the LORD...do good*” (Psalm 37:3). Don’t close down shop. Now, this is what God is saying. Don’t fret.

Have you ever thought about how many times in the Bible God has promised to meet our needs? He says, “*Trust in the LORD, and do good; [verily you’ll] dwell in the land, and [you’ll] be fed*” (Psalm 37:3). Over and over again, the Bible tells us that He’s gonna take care of us. Let me give you a verse of Scripture that—Matthew 6, verse 33: “*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33). Don’t put things first; put God first. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [will] be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33). I wonder if you really believe that. I wonder if I really believe it. Seek

God first.

Now, why is God telling us that? You say, “So we can have provision?” Probably not. You probably would have food if you didn’t trust the Lord. “Whoa, blasphemy!” No, most people in this city are not Christians; they have food. Most people have food. Most people have clothes. Most people have a house to live in, and they don’t trust the Lord. So, is God telling you to do this so you can have all the stuff? You probably would have it anyway. I’m... Don’t think I’m blaspheming. No!

Why is God telling you to “*seek...first the kingdom...and his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33)? He’s saying, “So you won’t be like the heathen.” He says, “*After...these things do the Gentiles seek*” (Matthew 6:32). That’s what occupies their minds. That’s what they’re thinking of night and day, day and night; that’s all they’re thinking about: “get all you can, and can all you get.” That’s all they’re thinking about. He says, “Listen, you trust Me. Let Me take care of that so you can serve Me.” What that does—it just frees you up to serve God. You don’t have to worry about these things. You put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because Jesus said, “*No man can serve two masters*” (Matthew 6:24). You can’t serve the things of this world and serve the Lord at the same time.

Now, notice Paul said, “*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*” (Philippians 4:11). See, God puts you in school. I think God’s putting America in school. God will put our families in school. And, by the way, God will keep you there ’till you pass the test. You flunk out the first time, He’ll re-enroll you, and He won’t grade on the curve, so you have to learn to trust the Lord. Trust in the Lord when resources vanish. God says, “You’ll dwell in the land, and you will be fed” (Psalm 37:3).

II. Delight in the Lord When Dreams Dissolve

Now, here’s the second thing: Delight in the Lord when dreams dissolve. Look in verse 4: “*Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart*” (Psalm 37:4). Do you know why we fret sometimes when our dreams dissolve, when our joy is being threatened? You’ve got to find a source of joy that cannot be threatened. And, what is that? There’s only one source of joy that cannot be threatened: that’s the Lord. You see, you delight yourself in the Lord, and then the desire of your heart will be met. Now, if you delight yourself in finances, the desire of your heart can be threatened. If you delight yourself in family, not—it’s not wrong to love family—but you may have to kiss them goodbye. I mean, circumstances change. Only when your desire is totally wrapped up in the Lord Jesus Christ, at least primarily, then you’re gonna find the innermost needs of your heart are met.

So many people misread this verse, in verse 4 (Psalm 37:4). They get the idea, you know, “if I love God, I can have whatever I want.” No, if you love God, you’ve got what

you want. That's what it says. "Delight yourself in the Lord, and you'll have the desire of your heart, which is the Lord" (Psalm 37:4). Your innermost need is the Lord Himself. Do you know Him? Is He the chief desire of your heart even when your dreams dissolve? I met Corrie ten Boom one time and listened to her. She said this: "Look around, and you'll be distressed. Look within—you'll be depressed. Look to the Lord—you'll be at rest." "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4).

Now, I said God will put you in school. He'll teach you to trust, and He will not let you out of that school until your chief delight is in Him alone. Can you say that your heart pants for Him as the deer pants after the water brook? Children, and wealth, and home, and job—all these things can be threatened. That's the reason in 1929, General Slingluff was a youngster, a young boy, at that time. He's lived through a lot of things, a lot of wars. In 1929, when the stock market crashed, people were jumping out of buildings. You know why? They were jumping out of buildings because that's where their delight was, and their dreams had dissolved.

Listen to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 34: the writer of Hebrews said—and I believe it was Paul—*"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods"* (Hebrews 10:34). Now, what if you got home tonight and somebody had been through your house? And, what if they emptied your house because you're a believer, a Christian? What if some army came in there and took away everything that you had? That's what happened to these early Christians. The Bible says, *"And they took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in heaven a better and...enduring substance"* (Hebrews 10:34). *You want to know everything you have that really counts? You add up everything you have that money can't buy and death can't take away.* These early Christians saw their houses looted; they saw their material things taken away. And yet, they were praising God. I had to ask myself this question: Could I do that? Could you do that?

Let me give you a great verse—2 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 10: Paul speaks of those believers *"as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"* (2 Corinthians 6:10). You see, that's the tension that you have in your life—the sorrow. There are sorrows that come—when a loved one has cancer, a baby dies, a home is broken, a child runs away. There's "sorrow, yet always rejoicing"—*"as poor, [and] yet making many rich"*—many of these who lined up across here to go to Central America—they are giving all that they have to go, and some are giving money to help them go. They're going as poor people to make many rich. And then, he... I love this—*"as having nothing, and possessing all things"* (2 Corinthians 6:10). That's so great. The devil comes to you, and he says, "Look, if you will serve me, I'll pay you well." You say, "Devil, I... You don't need to pay me; you can't pay me. I have everything, so what can you give me?" "Well," he says, "listen, if you don't serve me, I'll take away everything you've got." You say, "You can't take away

anything; I don't have anything." You see, "as possessing nothing, and having all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). What can the devil do with a man like that? That's the man, that's the woman, whose delight is in the Lord.

You can tell so much about a person by what makes them mad, sad, or glad, can't you? "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desire of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).

III. Commit Your Way to the Lord When Your Lifestyle is Threatened

All right. Now, here's the third thing. First of all, he says, "*Trust in the LORD*" (Psalm 37:3). Number two: Delight in the Lord (Psalm 37:4). Number three: Commit your way to the Lord when your lifestyle is threatened.

Now, my lifestyle has changed since September the 11th. I mean, I...being on these airplanes—it's different. Going through the...trying to get on one of those. I was on an airplane last night, and the pilot said this: he said, "Now look, we're at war." He said, "I'm counting on you folks in the cabin to help take care of things." And, he said, "If something happens, you take care of our girls." I felt every man on that plane just swell up and look around. I looked everybody over, you know. That's a change in lifestyle. And, he said, "Now, don't get all upset if somebody doesn't get a Diet Coke, but keep your eyes open." That's a change in lifestyle, isn't it? And, many of us don't want our lifestyles to be changed.

But now, notice Psalm 37, verse 5: "*Commit thy way unto the LORD*" (Psalm 37:5). Do you know what the word *way* means? It means "lifestyle." It has the idea of a well-traveled path. That's the way we're used to living—your lifestyle, your way of life, your reputation, your career. He says here, "*Commit [your] way*"—your lifestyle—"*unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass*" (Psalm 37:5). Now, this word *trust* has a different meaning than the first word *trust*. It literally means "to roll your way on the Lord, just put it in His hands. Commit it to Him. Give it to Him. Roll it on Him." Now, if you do that—listen carefully—your standard of living may be changed, but not your standard of life. It's very important you understand that. There's a difference between a standard of living and a standard of life. And, he says, "You just roll that on the Lord."

Now, your "way" means your "reputation" as well as your "lifestyle." You don't need to protect yourself if somebody says something bad about you. Somebody told me the other day, "Oh, Pastor Rogers, everybody loves you." I said, "Good night! I wish they did." No, I'm glad they don't. Jesus said, "*[Beware] when all men speak well of you!*" (Luke 6:26). You ought to read some of my mail. You'd know everybody doesn't love me. But, you don't have to protect yourself. Listen to this—Psalm 37, verse 5: "*Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall [direct thy paths]*"—and then, he says in verse 6—"*And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy*

judgment as the noonday" (Psalm 37:5–6). Roll it on the Lord.

Suppose you had in your breast pocket up here 100,000 dollars in cold cash. You say, "Yeah, it'd be neat, wouldn't it?" But, let's just suppose you had 100,000 dollars—100 1,000 dollar bills. Do they make a thousand dollar bill, Mark? Is there such a thing? All right. You've got one hundred of those in your breast pocket tonight, and you'd be saying to yourself, "Hey, man, I ought not to walk around with that much cash"—and really, you shouldn't, you know—"I might lose it. Somebody might know I have it. I might get mugged. I need to get... I need to do something with this." Well, what do you do? When the bank is open in the morning, you go to the bank, you fill out a deposit slip, you take that money, you count it out, and you give it to the lady or the man there, and you just shove it over that way. They take it and count it, put it wherever they put it, and give you a receipt. What did you do? You committed it, right? Whew! It's gone. It's still mine, but I've put it in their trust. That's what you need to learn how to do—just take it and put it in His trust; just commit it to Him. Now, if you do that, you won't get a couple of revolvers and sit on the front steps of the bank, you know, to protect your money. If you didn't think that they could take care of it, you wouldn't give it to them; you'd put it somewhere else. You see, there comes a time when you roll your burdens on the Lord—your way, your lifestyle—and you trust Him with it. You give it to Him. When it's threatened, just say, "Here, Lord, I roll that on You."

I told you a long time ago about a man who was failing in his life. He was a salesman; he couldn't sell anything, wore a shabby old suit, and he drove a rattle trap, old, dusty old car. And, his wife was faded and ugly, and his kids were flunking out of school. He lived on the wrong side of the tracks. This guy was the born loser. Then, one day, he changed—began to stand up straight, put a smile on his face, dressed up nice, driving a fine automobile. His kids were making super grades. His wife went to the beauty shop and got herself overhauled. And, he's just radically changed. Somebody said, "What did you do?" He said, "Well, you remember how I used to fret all the time, used to worry all the time? It just sapped so much strength out of me I couldn't—I couldn't—do what I was supposed to do." He said, "I've just quit worrying." "Well, man, how'd you do that?" He said, "You know what I found? I found in our city, there's a firm that has professional worriers, and what you do—you go down there, sometimes once a day, at least once a week, and you tell them all your problems, and you just give it to them, and they stay there and worry for you, and then you go out and do all you're supposed to do, and they just stay there and worry so you're not. You just—you just—hand it over to them." That guy said, "Well, does it work?" He said, "Does it work? Look at me! Look at the change in my life." He said, "That's amazing. How much does that cost?" He said, "Two thousand dollars a week." He said, "Good night! How you gonna pay for that?" "Oh," he said, "that's his worry."

Hey, folks—there is somebody that you can roll your burden on and doesn't cost 2,000 dollars a week. The Bible says, "Commit your way unto your Lord, and trust also in Him. He will bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5). Roll your burden on the Lord when your lifestyle is threatened, when your way doesn't seem to be right.

IV. Rest in the Lord When God Seems Slow to Act

And then, come to the fourth thing that he says here. Watch it now: rest in the Lord when God seems slow to act. Look, if you will, in verse 7 now: "*Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace*" (Psalm 37:7–11). "*Rest in the LORD*" (Psalm 37:7).

Now friend, you can't rest until you're trusting, until you're delighted, and until you are committed. Once you trust in the Lord, once you delight yourself in the Lord—I mean, He is the chief desire of your heart; you delight in the Lord—and then once you just roll everything on the Lord, then—then—he can say—and only then—"*rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him*" (Psalm 37:7). And, this word *rest*—it also actually means—and some of you have translations that will say this because I looked it up in several translations—it literally has the idea of being silent before the Lord. It means "don't murmur." Rest in the Lord—don't complain; don't murmur. Commit it to Him.

Now, one man said, "I'm upset." He said, "Why?" "Because I'm in a hurry, and God's not." Well, you can't hurry the Lord up. You have to wait patiently for God. Proverbs 30, verse 5: "*For anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (Psalm 30:5). I like that—"*joy [comes] in the morning*" (Psalm 30:5). He's saying that His presence is like the sunrise: "*joy [comes] in the morning*" (Psalm 30:5). You know, there's one thing about the sunrise: you can't hurry it up. I'll tell you something else about it: you can't stop it. One of these days, in God's timing, He's gonna pull back the shades of night and pin them with a star, open the door of the morning, and flood your world with His joy and His peace. And, we need to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. I told you after this happened, there's no panic in Heaven—none—only plans. "The kingdom of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ" (Revelation 11:15). "*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*" (Matthew 5:5).

Conclusion

I heard about a little boy who sat up one night all night long, wondering where the sun went. Finally, it dawned on him. It'll dawn on you. *"[And] unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings"* (Malachi 4:2). And friend, when we trust in the Lord, when we delight in the Lord, when we commit to the Lord, when we rest in the Lord, we'll be too blessed to be stressed. Would you agree? So, take this psalm, and when you think of old Osama, read Psalm 37, and *"fret not thyself because of evildoers"* (Psalm 37:1). What a mighty God we serve! Amen? Praise His name.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father God, we do thank You for Your Word. Lord, it's so wonderful to have these promises. Now Lord, we know it's one thing to preach it. It's another thing to hear it. It's another thing to believe it and live it. So, Lord, bring the Word from our heads to our hearts. We pray in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

Grace: Greater than Our Guilt

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 13, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 38

“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.”

PSALMS 38:18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Tragedy of Sin in the Life of a Saint
 - A. Sin Will Displease God
 - 1. God Shows His Displeasure by Words of Wrath
 - 2. God Shows His Displeasure by Arrows of Conviction
 - 3. God Shows His Displeasure by the Hand of Pressure
 - B. Sin Will Dissipate Strength
 - 1. Sin Wearies You
 - 2. Sin Weights You
 - 3. Sin Wounds You
 - 4. Sin Worries You
 - 5. Sin Wastes You
 - 6. Sin Weakens You
 - C. Sin Will Deadens the Soul
 - 1. It Will Spiritually Blind You
 - 2. It Will Spiritually Deafen You
 - 3. It Will Spiritually Dumb You
 - D. Sin Will Distance Your Friends
 - E. Sin Will Delight Your Enemies
- II. The Remedy for Sin in the Life of the Saint
 - A. The Sinner's Confidence
 - B. The Sinner's Contrition
 - C. The Sinner's Confession
 - D. The Sinner's Cleansing

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God's precious Word, the Holy Bible. By the way, did you bring your Bible? Hold your Bibles up. Let me see them. Hold them up. I want to look at them. You've got all kinds of colors. Let's wave them at the Lord. Amen. Thank God for His Word. Take it down, and turn, if you will, to Psalm 38. And, the title of our sermon tonight is just a

continuation of the theme of grace, and it is “Grace: Greater than Our Guilt.” You know, I spoke this morning about the person who is a perfectionist, who’s in the performance trap, and we said that one of the problems with that kind of an individual is unresolved guilt—unresolved guilt. He has unrealistic goals, and he has unresolved guilt; and he has unrealized glory. He never gets what he wants. And, I want us to look at the middle of this thing here and find out what to do with our guilt.

And, incidentally, if you were to ask an individual, “What is guilt?” the average individual would say, “Well, guilt—that’s the feeling you have when you do something wrong.” Well, that’s not true. That’s not what guilt is; that’s the guilt feeling.

If you put your hand on a hot stove and you have pain, the pain is not the burn. It’s the burn that causes the pain. The burn is the raw skin; the burn is the blister. And so, the feeling that you have—that guilt feeling—that is no guilt; it is guilt feeling.

Now, we want to do something about that feeling, but it would be sad, indeed, to do something about that feeling and not do anything about the guilt. Guilt is the condition, and the punishment of that condition is God’s wrath. Something must be done—not about the feeling, but about the condition. That’s the reason that no psychiatrist on this earth—no psychologist on this earth—and no educator on this earth can deal with guilt, unless they do it with the grace of God. Now, thank God for Christian psychiatrists. Thank God for Christian psychologists. Thank God for Christian educators who understand the grace of God. But, you see, all the psychiatrist can do apart from the grace of God is to teach you not to touch the stove again or to help you deaden the pain, but they cannot do anything about the guilt itself. Only the grace of God can remove guilt.

Now, we have a generation of people who are big about dealing with guilt feelings, but they don’t understand how to deal with guilt. And, the deepest need in many lives and many who are saved is what to do with guilt. They are haunted by the ghost of guilt. One psychiatrist estimated—and it may be a high estimate—but he said that “almost”—I think he didn’t say almost—he said, “One hundred percent of people in mental institutions in America are there because they cannot handle guilt.” Well, that seems like an extreme to me, but if he were to even say that, it means that it is a major, major problem. And, it brings all kinds of psychological, emotional, and physical problems with it.

Well, Psalm 38 is a psalm that deals with this matter of guilt, and we’re going to look at it. You know, even when preachers talk about this subject, so many times they talk about renewal. Renewal has the idea that you’re already basically right and you just need to kind of freshen up. But, the word that is needed in America today is not *renewal*; it is *repentance*. And, that’s what this psalm deals with. What this psalm is, is the prayer of a guilty man; it’s the prayer of King David, who, while he was a great

sinner and a great saint, was also a great theologian and a great repenter. So, we get to learn something about how God's grace deals with guilt. What you have in this psalm is really the prayer of a guilty man, and it's a beautiful thing; it has blessed my heart. Now, first of all, we're going to take the psalm and put it into two halves: first of all, we're going to talk about the tragedy of sin in the life of a saint; and then, we're going to talk about the remedy for sin in the life of a saint. Now, that's easy to remember—the tragedy and the remedy.

I. The Tragedy of Sin in the Life of a Saint

What is the tragedy of sin in the life of a saint? Well, I want to mention some things that sin will do in your heart and in your life. Now, when you get saved, you're going to find out that God does not fix you where you cannot sin any more. But, if you do sin, here's what your sin will do.

A. Sin Will Displease God

David's sin, number one, displeased his God. Look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2 of this psalm: he says here, "*O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath*"—underscore the word *wrath*—"neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore" (Psalm 38:1–2). Now, there are certain things that stand out in these two verses.

1. God Shows His Displeasure by Words of Wrath

First of all, there are words of wrath. He says, "*O Lord, rebuke me now in thy wrath*" (Psalm 38:1). Do you see the word *rebuke*? One of the ways that you can know that you're saved is not whether or not you can sin, but when you do sin, does God rebuke you? I know God rebukes me. The Holy Spirit speaks to me; the Holy Spirit puts His finger on the sore spot and pushes.

2. God Shows His Displeasure by Arrows of Conviction

Not only are there words of rebuke, but there are arrows of conviction. Look in verse 2: "*thine arrows stick fast in me*" (Psalm 38:2). Has God ever shot you? Brother, He does me. You're going to be pierced with pain when you sin. God will speak to you. He'll rebuke you. God will shoot you with an arrow of conviction.

3. God Shows His Displeasure by the Hand of Pressure

And, not only are there words of wrath and arrows of conviction, but there is the hand of pressure. Look, if you will, in verse 2: "*thy hand presseth me sore*" (Psalm 38:2). Some people get the idea that if you're a child of God and you sin, He just tosses you away. No, it's just the opposite. Friend, He puts you in His grip, and He squeezes—He squeezes. He bears down. It's not that He casts you off, but He squeezes you all the tighter. Here's old David feeling that fellowship broken, that hand of pressure that is

there. Now, the mark of a child of God, when he sins, is broken fellowship with God. My sin displeases God, and that may be the most costly price of all.

Now, if you're here tonight, and your name is on this church roll, or you are listening to me by radio, or later by tape, and there's sin in your life, and there are no words of wrath, no arrows of conviction, no hand of pressure in your life, I suggest you better get saved—you better get saved. David was a saved man, and he found out that, number one, his sin displeased his God. The Bible speaks in verse 1 of God's *"hot displeasure"* (Psalm 38:1).

B. Sin Will Dissipate Strength

The second thing it did: not only did it displease his God; it dissipated his strength. And, six ways it dissipated his strength—look, if you will, here:

1. Sin Wearies You

First of all, his sin wearied him. Look in verse 3: *"There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin"* (Psalm 38:3). You know what the Bible says? There is no rest for wicked (Isaiah 57:20). Some people have difficulty sleeping, and sometimes the difficulty that people have sleeping is neurological. Sometimes it's simply digestive. But, many times, it's because of unresolved sin in the heart and in the life. And, for those people, a clear conscience would do much better than a sleeping pill. Unresolved guilt saps the strength out of your life. *"The joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Nehemiah 8:10). But, when you sin, the joy goes, and your sin will tire you out. You'll be frazzled. His sin wearied him. In verse 3, he said, "There's no rest" (Psalm 38:3).

2. Sin Weights You

His sin weighted him. In verse 4, look at it: *"For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as [a] heavy burden they are too heavy for me"* (Psalm 38:4). The man with unresolved sin in his life is carrying around a load, a weight—like a hundred-pound weight on his shoulders. In Mexico City, one time, I lead a young man to Christ. We sat in the Volkswagen. (I'd hired the Volkswagen to take me around.) And, after our trip, I sat there and led the young man to Christ. And, when he prayed with me after receiving Christ, he said something I'll never be able to forget: he said, "Mister, this is wonderful." He said, "It feels like I've been carrying around a bag of stones and I've just set it down." Isn't that beautiful? He said, "I've had this bag of stones, and I just set it down." Well, that's what sin is like: it's like a bag of stones. It weighted him down. "Look," he says, "my burden is too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:4).

3. Sin Wounds You

Then, not only did his sin weary him and weight him; it wounded him. Look in verse 5: *"My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness"* (Psalm 38:5). Now, was

this physical suffering? Was he physically wounded? I don't think so. I think what he's talking about, now, is where the arrow of conviction shot him. I think he's talking about, now, where spiritual gangrene sat in, and his spirit stinks. He is wounded spiritually. There are two kinds of wounds that can come to the human psyche: one is sorrow, and the other is guilt. Both are deep, red, raw wounds. But, sorrow is a clean wound: given time, it will heal. Guilt is a dirty wound, and it will never heal until it's cleansed. And, here's what David is talking about now. His sin is festering in him. His sin has wearied him. It has weighted him. It has wounded him.

4. Sin Worries You

And, it worries him. Look, if you will, in verse 6: *"I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long"* (Psalm 38:6). Again, listen, when God saves you, He doesn't fix you up where you can't sin any more, but mister, He fixes you up where you can't sin and enjoy it any more—He really does. His sin—he said, "I'm troubled" (Psalm 38:6). *The most miserable man in the world is not a lost man; the most miserable man or woman in the world is a saved man out of fellowship with God.* His sin worried him.

5. Sin Wastes You

And, his sin wasted him. Look in verse 7: *"For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh"* (Psalm 38:7). In this verse, I believe he's talking about a genuine disease. I believe that David had venereal disease when he said, *"My loins are filled with a loathsome disease"* (Psalm 38:7). David committed immorality, and I believe he transacted a disease. I want to say something to you: God forgives, but nature never does—God forgives, but nature doesn't. And, don't think that you can sow wild oats and then have crop failure. David played fast and loose. And, you know all of the disgusting symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases, and I don't even want to stand up here and have to talk about this. But, there's damage to the brain, and to the skin, and to the eyes, the bones, the liver, the teeth, unborn children, premature death. We have people today talking about safe sex. You know what we need to talk about? Sacred sex. One man with one woman, married, living together is God's plan. People say, "What are we going to do about the AIDS epidemic?" Why don't we try this? Why don't we try this? I mean, it is so simple—so simple. When all else fails, just simply read the directions.

6. Sin Weakens You

His sin wasted him, and his sin weakened him. Look, if you will, in verse 8 of this same chapter: *"I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart"* (Psalm 38:8). Why, David, the mighty warrior, has been brought low. He's broken in body. He's broken in soul. He's broken in spirit, and he's crying out in pain. I

wonder what his servants thought as they passed his door and listened to him in his sick room. I'll tell you this much about sin, folks: *sin promises a lot, but it pays very poorly.*

C. **Sin Will Deaden the Soul**

Well, we're talking about what sin does to the child of God, and we said that his sin displeased his God. We've said that his sin dissipated his strength. Here's the third thing it does: it deadened his soul—it deadened his soul. Look, if you will, in verses 9 and 10: “[O] Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me” (Psalm 38:9–10). How did it deaden his soul?

1. **It Will Spiritually Blind You**

Well, first of all, he became spiritually blind. Look at it: he says, “As for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me” (Psalm 38:10). Again, he's talking, now, as a poet. He is spiritually blind. He is—he is—blind to God's blessings. He's stumbling in darkness.

2. **It Will Spiritually Deafen You**

But, not only is he spiritually blind; he's spiritually deaf. Look in verse 13: “But I, as a deaf man, heard not” (Psalm 38:13)—spiritually blind, spiritually deaf. David had enemies, and the enemies were out there; and they wanted to trap him. But now, he's very vulnerable to danger. He is blind to blessing and deaf to danger.

3. **It Will Spiritually Dumb You**

But, not only is he spiritually blind and spiritually deaf; he's spiritually dumb. Look in verse 13: “But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that [opened] not his mouth” (Psalm 38:13). Sin had shut his mouth. Here's the sweet singer of Israel, but he has no song. Praise is dried up. Testimony is withered. Soul winning is stopped altogether. What has sin done to the child of God? It displeased his God. It dissipated his strength. It deadened his soul.

D. **Sin Will Distance Your Friends**

Tell you what else it did: it distanced his friends. Look in verse 11: “My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off” (Psalm 38:11). The word *sore* is the word that is translated as “leper.” Actually, he was a moral leper. And, in other words, people didn't want to be around him. You know what sin will do to you? Sin will make you hard to live with. Nobody wants to be around you. A Christian with a wounded conscience is hard to live with. A backslidden Christian is one of the most unlovely people I know of. I'm going to tell you a secret: I'd rather be with a good old-fashioned, all-American sinner who'd never been saved for company than a backslidden Christian—really. I mean, these people are not at peace with themselves. They are out

of joint. They are hard to live with. And, God help a church when you get somebody in the church who is out of fellowship God! There are far more difficulties caused in the church by those kinds of people than by the pagans who come and sit and listen. Isn't that an amazing thing? He said, *"My friends [just] stand aloof from [me]"* (Psalm 38:11).

E. **Sin Will Delight Your Enemies**

Well, it distanced his friends. I tell you what else it did: it delighted his enemies. Look in verse 12 of this: *"They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long"* (Psalm 38:12). The devil, your enemy, is strategizing against you moment by moment by moment by moment; and like a shark, he wants to smell blood in the water. And, when you stumble, when you trip, when you fall, when you sin, what a delight it is!

Look in verse 16: *"For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me"* (Psalm 38:16). Did you know that there are people who would love to see you fall into sin? Did you know there are people who'd love to see me fall into sin? They would. They're enemies of the cross of Christ and the cause of Christ—would love to see, delight to see, some man of God, some woman of God, some teacher, some deacon, some leader, some evangelist fall into sin.

What does sin do to the child of God? It displeases his God. It dissipates his strength. Friend, it deadens his soul. It distances his friends. It delights his enemies. That's the tragedy of sin in the life of a child of God. When we have an un-confessed sin in our heart and in our life, it delights Satan because we have given Satan a beachhead, a place to work. That's the reason the Apostle Paul said, *"[Don't] let...the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:26–27).

II. **The Remedy for Sin in the Life of the Saint**

Now, enough of that. Let's turn it over. Let's look at it not only from the tragedy, but let's look at it from the remedy, and how grace can deal with guilt. Now remember, it's not the guilt feeling that we're dealing with; it is the guilt, not the pain. It is the burn that we're dealing with. Four wonderful steps to freedom—they're right here in this psalm:

A. **The Sinner's Confidence**

First of all, there is what I want to call "the sinner's confidence." Look in verse 15; here's what made David such a great man: *"For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God"* (Psalm 38:15). Now, that is his rock-ribbed confidence. He knew that he knew that God would hear his prayer. He knew that God stood ready to forgive and to cleanse. I have said it often: you may disappoint God, you may break God's heart, you may disgrace God—but there's nothing you can do to stop God from loving you. He

loves you. And, he says, *“For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God”* (Psalm 38:15). Always, friend, believe that there is a God of glory, and the hope of cleansing is there if you want it. Nothing—nothing—can separate you from God’s mighty love, and there is no guilt His blood cannot wash away. Have I put that confidence in your heart? Does the Word of God—verse 15 (Psalm 38:15)—put that confidence in your heart? There is the sinner’s confidence.

B. The Sinner’s Contrition

Secondly, there must be the sinner’s contrition. That confidence must be inseparably and inextricably interwoven with contrition and brokenness. You must come to the end of your sin. Look, if you will, in verses 17 and 18: *“For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin”* (Psalm 38:17–18). Nobody has ever repented until he’s sorry for his sin. There can be no repentance without sorrow. The Bible says it is *“godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance”* (2 Corinthians 7:10). There must be that contrition. You see, David is at the end of his rope. I mean, he’s had it. When he said, *“I am ready to halt”* (Psalm 38:17), what that literally means is, “I have no more confidence in self-effort. I’m not going to try to cover it up any more. I am genuinely sick of this.”

Last week, I shared with a young man. He said, “I am sick of my sin.” I cannot tell you how my heart began to leap with joy when he said that. He said, “I am sick of it.” I said, “Hallelujah! Let’s get down on our knees.” We got down on our knees, and friend, he left that bag of stones there and got up a whole man, saved, born again by the grace of God. But, he never would have ’till he came to that place. Sometimes people waltz down the isles of churches and join churches like they’re doing God a wild favor, and they have never, ever repented of their sin. There is no forgiveness without repentance—no forgiveness without repentance. And, there is no repentance without sorrow. *“Godly sorrow worketh repentance”* (2 Corinthians 7:10). There’s the sinner’s confidence. There’s the sinner’s contrition.

C. The Sinner’s Confession

There is the sinner’s confession. Look in verse 18: *“For I will declare mine iniquity”—“mine iniquity”* (Psalm 38:18)—“not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, O Lord.” Clearly confess your sin to God. Make no excuses for your sin. I will be sorry for my sin. To *confess* means “to agree with.”

When I preached a series of messages here not very long ago on “Back to the Basics,” I dealt with a cleansed life, and I dealt with 1 John 1:9 that says, *“If we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanses us from all unrighteousness.”* And, I pointed out to you that the word *confess* is a composite word—*homologeō*, which means “to say the same as.” To confess your sin does not mean to

admit your sin. You can admit your sin and not confess it in God's sight of you. But, when you confess it, you admit it; but you go beyond the admission, and you judge it. You say about that sin what God says about it. You see that sin from God's viewpoint. You say with God what God says about that sin. When you agree with God about it, when you come over against it and take sides against it, you have confessed that sin.

There's the sinner's confidence: "God, I hope in You. You're my God." There's the sinner's contrition: "I am sorry for my sin." There is the sinner's confession: "*I will declare [my] iniquity*" (Psalm 38:18).

D. The Sinner's Cleansing

And then, friend, there's the sinner's cleansing. Look in verses 21 and 22: "*Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation*" (Psalm 38:21–22). Now, know that when you're forgiven, you are restored completely and totally. And, it is gone, it is buried, it is cleansed—never to be brought up again. And, why? God will forgive me, because that's the kind of a God that He is. "*Forsake me not, O LORD...my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation*" (Psalm 38:21–22). That literally means, "O God, my Savior—my Savior."

Now, I don't care what you've done—how bad it is. You probably have not sinned as badly as David. First of all, his sin was horrible. It was a sexual sin—at first, a hot-blooded sin, and then a cold-blooded sin. It was the sin of duplicity; it was the sin of treachery, because he sinned against Uriah the Hittite. It was a sin that took a man's life. It was a sin that disgraced a nation. It was a great sin because he was a man in leadership. David did terribly, but friend, God cleansed him.

Now, listen to me: "*If we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin]*"—now, listen—"*and to cleanse us*"—cleanse. Did you hear that? Not patch—"*cleanse us from all*"—not some, but from all—"*iniquity*" (1 John 1:9). And, He's faithful and just to do it. If He didn't do it, He would be a liar. He would be unfaithful. And, if He didn't do it, He would be unjust. Why? Because Jesus died for those sins, and those sins have been paid for. That's grace.

Conclusion

When you preach on grace, you walk the razor's edge, because some people think you're being light on sin. Oh, no—I'm not trying to minimize sin. Sin is tragic. I'm maximizing the grace of God. You say, "Well, I haven't sinned like David sinned." No, but come up close, and I'm going to tell you something: you need as much grace as he did, no matter who you are and where you are. And, the sweetest teenager in this church without Christ is just as lost as the worst thief and pervert in America, and it

takes as much of the blood of Jesus to save him or her as it does that person. But, thank God there is grace. And, “*where sin [did abound], grace did much more abound*” (Romans 5:20). Isn’t this a wonderful psalm? Thank God for it, and it’s right there, folks—it’s right there. We can see the tragedy, and we can see the remedy.

Father God, thank You for Your Word tonight. Seal it to our hearts. In Jesus’ precious name. amen.

How to Say Goodbye to Guilt

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: May 2, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 38

“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.”

PSALMS 38:18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Tragedy of Sin in the Life of a Saint
 - A. Sin Will Displease God
 - 1. God Shows His Displeasure by Words of Wrath
 - 2. God Shows His Displeasure by Arrows of Conviction
 - 3. God Shows His Displeasure by the Hand of Pressure
 - B. Sin Will Dissipate Strength
 - 1. Sin Wearies You
 - 2. Sin Weights You
 - 3. Sin Wounds You
 - 4. Sin Worries You
 - 5. Sin Wastes You
 - C. Sin Will Deaden the Soul
 - 1. It Will Spiritually Blind You
 - 2. It Will Spiritually Deafen You
 - 3. It Will Spiritually Dumb You
 - D. Sin Will Distance Your Friends
 - E. Sin Will Delight Your Enemies
- II. The Remedy for Guilt
 - A. The Sinner’s Confidence
 - B. The Sinner’s Contrition
 - C. The Sinner’s Confession
 - D. The Sinner’s Cleansing

Conclusion

Introduction

Tonight, would you open God’s Word to Psalm 38, please? Psalm 38 is an incredible psalm. I’ve been rejoicing in it, and I want you to rejoice in it. And, I can promise you that what it has to say will fit your need tonight, if you endeavor to live with God. The title of the message tonight is “How to Say Goodbye to Guilt”—“How to Say Goodbye to Guilt.”

Now, the deepest need that many Christians—I'm talking about fine Christians—have is to learn what to do with guilt. And, many Christians are seeking psychological help when really what they need to do is to learn what Psalm 38 has to say. As a matter of fact, a leading psychiatrist said... This is what he said—now, a psychiatrist—he said, “Almost 100% of people in mental institutions are there because they do not know how to handle guilt—almost 100%.” Guilt gives you a terrible self-image.

When I was a boy, the entertainment was Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen. Do you remember Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen? And, Edgar Bergen, who was the ventriloquist, would say, “I'm my own worst enemy.” And, Charlie McCarthy would say, “Not while I'm around.” And, I believe that that's almost the way our conscience is.

Guilt that we carry around with us—it's continually accusing us and finding fault with us, and it's the cause of depression. Many, many believers are depressed, and their soul becomes like a dirty window, yellowed with the grime and the dirt of guilt. Many are physically sick because of guilt.

Now, I think even before we get into this psalm we need to talk about what guilt is. I would say, if I were to ask you what guilt is, 99%—well, not you, but 99% of the people on the street—would say this: that guilt is the feeling you have when you've done something wrong. And, that is wrong. That is not what guilt is; that is the guilt feeling.

Now, if you put your hand on a hot stove, it's going to burn, and the nerves are going to send a message to your brain and say, “I feel terrible, especially in my hand, but also all over.” And, you will move your hand, and then you will feel kind of stupid and angry that you put your hand down there on that hot stove, or maybe angry at the person who turned the stove on and didn't let you know it was hot. But, what is the burn? The burn is not the pain you feel, nor the anger you feel. The burn is the raw skin and the blisters. Now, so many times we describe guilt in terms of pain and feeling, but that's not what guilt is. The pain, the feeling, the anger, or whatever it is—that is the result of guilt. Guilt is the condition of sin and the corresponding punishment that is the result of a transgression of a law of God.

Now, that's the reason that no psychiatrist or no psychologist, no matter how kind he is or how skilled he is, can deal with guilt unless he knows the Word of God—not a one. Now, some of them do, and I thank God for that. But, all a worldly psychologist can do—all an unsaved psychiatrist can do—is to help you deaden the pain or maybe to have better sense not to put your hand on the hot stove. But, he cannot deal with guilt; only God can remove guilt. And, we need to learn this. I'm not against psychiatry; I'm not against psychology. But, I'm saying to you that it has limits, and it can never deal with the deepest needs that people have, which is to deal with sin and guilt.

Now, this psalm is a psalm of David, and it's a wonderful psalm because it tells us how to handle guilt. What it is, is the prayer of a guilty man. Look in the first six verses:

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long” (Psalm 38:1–6).

Now, let me talk to you tonight—a two-point message.

I. The Tragedy of Sin in the Life of a Saint

First of all, I want you to see the tragedy of sin in the life of a saint—tragedy of sin in the life of a saint. What will sin do to you? Well, look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2—look again: *“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure”* (Psalm 38:1).

A. Sin Will Displease God

The first thing that sin will do—and this is the worst thing: it will displease God. Look in verse 1: *“thy hot displeasure”* (Psalm 38:1). Now, how does God show His displeasure?

1. God Shows His Displeasure by Words of Wrath

He speaks of words of wrath. He says, *“Rebuke me not in thy wrath”* (Psalm 38:1). God the Holy Spirit will speak to you when you’re guilty. And, if the Holy Spirit of God doesn’t speak to you when you sin, you need to be saved; you’re not a child of God. God’s Holy Spirit will always put His finger on the sore spot and push, and God will speak words of wrath.

2. God Shows His Displeasure by Arrows of Conviction

But, not only will there be words of wrath; there will be arrows of conviction. Look in verse 2: *“thine arrows stick fast in me”* (Psalm 38:2). Has God ever shot you? Boy, He shot me. God knows how to put an arrow right in my heart. And, your heart will be pierced with pain if you’re a child of God and you’ve sinned against God.

3. God Shows His Displeasure by the Hand of Pressure

But, not only are there words of wrath, not only are there arrows of conviction, but there is the hand of pressure. Look in verse 2: *“and thy hand presseth me sore”* (Psalm 38:2). Now, some people have the idea that, if you sin, that God just sort of casts you off. But, if you’re a child of God, the opposite is true: God squeezes you all the tighter. God puts you in His grip, and God begins to squeeze. Now, let me tell you something—here is the mark of a child of God: when he feels the fellowship with God is broken, he knows that God is displeased, he is hurt, God speaks to him, God’s arrow pierces him, God’s hand of pressure is upon him. And, if you can sin—please listen—and there is no rebuke of the Spirit, if you can sin and there is no arrow to pierce your heart, if you can sin and

there is no pressure squeezing you, then I want to tell you, very frankly, you are not saved—you're not saved. You need to be saved. What does sin do? It displeased his God.

B. Sin Will Dissipate Strength

And, I'll tell you what else it did: it dissipated his strength. Now, under the heading of "The Dissipation of Strength," I want to show you six ways that sin will drain you. It's the worst thing you can do.

1. Sin Wears You

For example, look in verse 3. His sin wearied him. He says, "*There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin*" (Psalm 38:3). There is no rest for the wicked. A clear conscience is better than a sleeping pill. Nothing will zap your strength like unresolved guilt and sin.

2. Sin Weights You

Not only did his sin weary him; his sin weighted him. Look in verse 4: "*For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as [a] heavy burden they are too heavy for me*" (Psalm 38:4). You're carrying around a load of guilt; it's too heavy for you.

When I was in Mexico some time back, I hired a boy to drive me around in a little Volkswagen—little raggedy Volkswagen. It was about 22 or 23 years of age. Finally, we came to the front of the hotel and stopped, and I said, "Young man, may I speak to you?" And, he spoke good English. And, I took about 45 minutes and led him to Jesus Christ, and he was saved. And then, he said to me, "Mister," he said, "what you've taught me is so wonderful." He said, "It seems as though I have been carrying around a sack full of rocks, and I just set it down." That's what sin does: it weights you down. His sin wearied him; his sin weighted him.

3. Sin Wounds You

And then, look in verse 5. His sin wounded him. He says, "*My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness*" (Psalm 38:5). Now, is he talking about a physical wound, or is he talking about a spiritual wound? Here I think he's talking about a spiritual wound, because he's been shot with the arrow of God. Now, God did not literally shoot him, but he has, now, spiritual gangrene. He has a wounded conscience, and he continues to fester. He says, "*My wounds stink*" (Psalm 38:5).

Now, let me tell you the difference between guilt and sorrow. There are two great deep, raw wounds that can come to the human psyche: one is guilt, and the other is sorrow. Sorrow is a clean wound, though a painful wound—give it time, it will heal. Guilt is a dirty wound, and it will never heal until it is cleansed. That's what David is talking about. David is saying, "My sin wearies me. My sin weights me down. My sin has wounded me."

4. Sin Worries You

And, his sin worried him. Look, if you will, in verse 6: *“I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long”* (Psalm 38:6). Give me your attention. Listen to me. Do you know how you can tell whether you’re a child of God or not? The test is not weather or not you can sin—any body can sin; saved or lost, it is possible for you to sin—but here is the test: Can you sin and it not trouble you and not bother you? If it can, then you’re not saved. God doesn’t fix you up where you cannot sin any more, but God does fix you where you cannot sin and enjoy it any more. Look in verse 6 again: he says here, *“I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long”* (Psalm 38:6). *The most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man; the most miserable man on earth is a saved man out of fellowship with God.* More miserable is a saved man out of fellowship with God than any lost man has ever been.

5. Sin Wastes You

And so, his sin not only worried him, but his sin wasted him. Look, if you will, in verse 7: *“For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart”* (Psalm 38:7). And now, I think he is talking about actual, physical disease. I believe that David had a venereal disease. I believe, because of his promiscuity, that David caught a sexually transmitted disease, and that’s what he’s talking about right now: *“my loins are filled with a loathsome disease”* (Psalm 38:7). And, he’s talking here about the damage that a sexually transmitted disease can do. There’s the brain damage; the skin damage; the damage to the eyes, the liver, the teeth, to the unborn children; the premature death. David had sinned, and David had been promiscuous. And now, he has, in his flesh, the result of his sin—his sin wasted him.

You say, “But, didn’t he get forgiven?” Yes, he did. But, come up close, and I want to tell you something: God will forgive, but nature—never. God will forgive, but nature does not forgive. This is what happened to David. Now, I want to say that his sin displeased his God; his sin dissipated his strength.

C. Sin Will Deaden the Soul

The third thing it did—it deadened his soul. Look, if you will, in verses 9 and 10: *“[O] Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand [afar]”—“stand aloof”—“from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off”* (Psalm 38:9–11). Then, skip down to verse 13: *“But I [am] as a deaf man”—“But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth”* (Psalm 38:13). Now, I want you to see the deadness of the soul.

1. It Will Spiritually Blind You

In verse 10, he says, *“The light of mine eyes...is gone [out]”* (Psalm 38:10). Now, what he’s talking about now is he’s spiritually blind. He’s living in darkness; he’s stumbling in darkness. The Bible says, *“If we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). But, when a child of God gets out of fellowship with God, the light of his eyes goes out, and he cannot see he’s stumbling in darkness, and he is blind to blessing.

2. It Will Spiritually Deafen You

But, not only did he become spiritually blind; he became spiritually deaf. Verse 13: *“But I, as a deaf man, heard not”* (Psalm 38:13). And, there were many who wanted to hurt David; his enemies were there who wanted to harm him. But, he couldn’t hear about it. I mean, he was... His enemies were there; they wanted to trap him. Verse 14: *“Thus [was] I...a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs”* (Psalm 38:14). And, verse 19: *“But mine enemies are lively, and they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied”* (Psalm 38:19). You see, here was David, blind to blessing and deaf to danger—vulnerable.

3. It Will Spiritually Dumb You

But, not only is he spiritually blind and spiritually deaf; he was spiritually dumb. Look in verse 13: *“But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth”* (Psalm 38:13). Sin had shut his mouth. Praise had dried up. Testimony withered, and the sweet sing of Israel had lost his song.

D. Sin Will Distance Your Friends

But, not only did his sin displease his God, and not only did his sin dissipate his strength, and not only did his sin deaden his soul, but it distanced his friends. Look in verse 11: *“My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off”* (Psalm 38:11). Do you know there’s nothing that will make you more unlovely as a child than un-confessed and un-repent-ed-of sin in your life? I can tell you, I had much rather have the company of a good old-fashioned unsaved sinner than a backslidden child of God. That is the truth. The most cantankerous, obstreperous, censorious, hard to get along with, judgmental people are God’s people out of fellowship. People say, “Don’t get around David—don’t get around David. There’s something wrong with David,” and they just stand off. It distanced his friends.

E. Sin Will Delight Your Enemies

I’ll tell you what else it did: it delighted his enemies. Look in verse 12: *“They also [did] seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous*

things, and imagine deceits all the day long” (Psalm 38:12). He had some enemies. Look in verse 16: *“For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me”* (Psalm 38:16). There are plenty of people in this world who delight to see the righteous fall. They love to capitalize on the failure and the guilt—the misfortune—of God’s people. There are people who would love to see me fall in sin. There are people who would love to see me do wrong. They would not rejoice that I do right, but they would rejoice that I would do wrong. They would be happy to find some flaw, some fault, some problem, in me and in you. That’s the way the wicked are. And, not only does sin distance our friends, it delights our enemies. It gives—it gives—great joy to those who hate God.

Now that, dear friend, is the tragedy of sin in the life of a Christian. That is what guilt is, and that is what guilt does. Now, David was a man after God’s own heart, and David loved God. But, he took his eyes off God, and he fell into sin. And, you’re not a better man, a better woman, than David was. And so, I pray God that the first part of this psalm will be a warning to all of us.

II. The Remedy for Guilt

But now, let’s just turn it over, and I want us to look not only at the tragedy of sin and the tragedy of guilt in the life of a saint, but I want us to think of the remedy for guilt. I want to show you from this psalm how to say goodbye to guilt, and there are four wonderful steps.

A. The Sinner’s Confidence

The first step I want to call “the sinner’s confidence.” Look in verse 15: *“For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God”* (Psalm 38:15). This was David’s confidence. David was a great sinner, but he was a man after God’s own heart. He knew the heart of God, and he knew that God’s mighty love was there. And, David knew that if he came to God, that God would hear him. And, I want to say to any one who may be listening tonight on the radio, or someone here, or someone listening later by tape, that God loves you, and there’s no sin that you can commit that will make Him stop loving you. He loves you. Verse 15: *“For in thee, O LORD, do I hope”* (Psalm 38:15). That is step number one: the guilty man’s confidence.

B. The Sinner’s Contrition

But, step number two—and this is where many of us fail: not only the sinner’s confidence, but the sinner’s contrition. Read verses 17 and 18 here: *“For I will declare [my] iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin”* (Psalm 38:18). Well, I skipped verse 17: *“I am ready to halt”*—do you know what that means? It means “I’ve come to the end of myself. I am at the end of my rope. I’ve quit ‘alibi-ing.’ I have quit excusing. I have quit trying to

somehow skirt around this issue”—*“I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me”*—what he is saying is, “I’ve had enough”—*“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin”* (Psalm 38:17–18). He’s not trying to cover it up anymore. He is genuinely heartbroken.

Now, he’s not yet there, but he’s on the way, because the Bible says that *“godly sorrow worketh repentance”* (2 Corinthians 7:10). Have you ever realized what your sin has done to you? Have you ever realized what your sin does to others? Have you contemplated and thought about what a wound in the heart of God your sin is, and my sin is, when we displease God? Well, have the confidence that in God, there is hope. And, may that confidence be followed by contrition. Be like David, and say, “O God, my sin has broken my heart because it has broken Your heart, because O God, I know that not only have I broken Your laws; I have broken Your heart.”

C. The Sinner’s Confession

Now, here’s the third thing: first of all, confidence; then, contrition; and then, confession. Look in verse 18—look at it: *“For I will declare mine iniquity”* (Psalm 38:18). “I’ll call it by name. I declare. I confess it. I make no excuse for it.” Over in the New Testament, the Bible says in 1 John 1:9: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

There’s one thing that God will never accept for sin, and that is an excuse and an alibi. As long as you call your temper something other than ugliness and sin, you’ll never be forgiven. As long as you call your gossip something other than what it is (gossip and speaking evil), you will never be forgiven. Until you call your pride what it is, you’ll never be forgiven. The word *confess* literally means “to say the same as”—*homolegeo*: *homo* meaning “the same”; *legeo*, “to speak”—“to say the same thing.” That’s what it means in 1 John 1:9: *“If we confess our sins”*—“if we agree with God about our sin.” When you say about your sin what God says about your sin, then God is ready to cleanse and to forgive. *“If we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Now, notice the four steps. The first one is what? Confidence: “God, I hope in You.” The second is contrition: “I am sorry for my sin.” The third is confession: *“I will declare mine iniquity”* (Psalm 38:18). And, Psalm 51, the sister psalm to this psalm, in verses 3 and 4, David says, *“For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, [and] thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight”* (Psalm 51:3–4). David is saying, “It’s not my brother; it’s not my sister, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.”

When you ask God to forgive your sin, don’t pray, “God, forgive my sin,” and don’t pray, “If I have sinned, forgive me.” But, say, “Lord, forgive my temper,” or, “Forgive my

lie,” or, “Forgive my pride,” or, “Forgive my lust.” And, call it by name, and judge it in your heart and in your mind. And, the minute you say, “O God, in You I hope. God, I am truly sorry for what I have done, and I will declare my sin,” then, my friend, you’re almost there.

D. The Sinner’s Cleansing

Now, I can promise you on the authority on the Word of God that when you confess your sin, you’re ready to be cleansed, for the Bible says, *“If we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Now, think of those two words—*faithful* and *just*. What does that mean? That means if God did not forgive you, He would be unfaithful, and if God did not forgive you, He would be unjust. If God did not forgive you when you confessed your sins—I say this with respect—God would be a liar and a crook. Why? Because Jesus died, that you might be forgiven. Jesus purchased that forgiveness. First John 1:7 says, *“The blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). And, God would go back and turn His back on the transaction at Calvary if God failed to forgive. You could be absolutely, totally certain that if you have confidence, contrition, and confession, you’ll come to the last thing, which is cleansing.

Now, look, if you will, in verses 21 and 22: *“Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord”—“O Lord”—“[of] my salvation”* (Psalm 38:21–22). The word *salvation* means “deliverance.” There is a Savior; there is One who will forgive. And, as far as the east is from the west, so far will He remove your transgressions from you. And, you need not, and I need not, and no child of God ever needs to carry around the load of guilt—guilt that will displease God, guilt that will dissipate strength, guilt that will distance friends, guilt that will delight enemies, guilt that is one of the most terrible forms of dissipation. Tonight, you can lie down, and go to sleep, and say, “Absolutely, there is nothing between my soul and the Savior.”

I fail; I stumble. There are many things in my life where I need to grow, but I want to give you a testimony: there is no unconfessed sin, no guilt—absolutely clear.” You say, “Are you bragging?” No—no. That’s the way every person ought to be all the time—all the time. That’s not unusual; that’s normal. I would be a fool and a hypocrite to try to minister, to live, to preach with unconfessed sin in my heart. I’m not saying I’m perfect. I’m not saying that God is finished with me. I’m not saying there’s no room to grow. But, what unmitigated fools we are if we harbor sin in our lives when *“the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

“Well,” you say, “Pastor, do you really think tonight that I could be clean?” David was a murderer and an adulterer. He committed adultery, and to try to hide the sin, he committed murder, at the worst—manslaughter, at the best—when Uriah the Hittite was

slain. And yet, David prayed in Psalm 51—he said, “*Wash me, and [I’ll] be whiter than snow*” (Psalm 51:7).

Maybe there was a time when you were unfaithful to your wife on a business trip. Maybe there was a time as a younger person you conceived a baby and went to the doctor, and he performed an abortion on you. Maybe there was a time when you said some terrible thing to your mother and you’d give everything you possess if you’d not said it. Maybe there was a time when you took something that didn’t belong to you, and now there is no way that you can make restoration. Maybe there was time when you did something else, and the devil has been pointing a finger of blame and accusation at you. And, like that Mexican boy, you’ve been carrying around a load of rocks. It’s time you set it down. I want to tell you that you can be as clean, as pure, as the driven snow. And, if you’ve been a prostitute, God can make you as clean and pure as an arch-virgin. I’m telling you, friend: “*the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). He doesn’t just patch you up; He doesn’t just look over it. He forgives.

Some time ago, I told you the story of a preacher friend of mine who shared this story with me. His wife and he were having an anniversary, and he was going to buy her a dress. He took her to the dress shop, and she saw a white dress. It was beautiful. She tried it on—and ladies, it was just right. I mean, it fit right; it looked good. She loved it. But, they looked at the price tag and almost fell dead—incredibly expensive. And, he said to her, “Sweetheart, I don’t care. That’s your dress. It’s our anniversary, and I’m going to buy you that dress. And, I’m taking you to dinner in it.” And, he bought it for her, and he was so proud of her. They were so much in love.

And, she put on that white dress, and they went to dinner. They were having a wonderful time, and then they ordered dessert. Do you know what she ordered? Cherry pie. Sitting there, enjoying the evening, and you know what happened—the pie fell in her lap on that white dress. She said, “Oh, no! Look.” He said, “That’s all right, darling. Don’t worry. The dry cleaner will get it out.” She said, “I don’t know...it’s a cherry stain.” “Oh,” he said, “the dry cleaner can get it out.” So, they went home. He tried to make her feel better. They carried it to the cleaners. He said, “What is that stain?” They said, “It’s cherry pie.” He said, “Well, I’m not sure. I’ll see what I can do.”

So, they came back later on, and they said, “Did you do it? Did you get it clean?” He said, “Lady, let me show it to you. Do you see it? I want to be honest with you: I didn’t get it all the way out, but I got most of it. And actually, I got so much of the stain out that you wouldn’t even know it’s there if you didn’t look for it. That’s the best I can do. It’s almost gone. And, nobody but you will really know it’s there unless they really look for it.” So, she paid him and left. You know what the preacher told me? He said to me, “Adrian, she never wore that dress again—never again.”

Almost, but not altogether. Friend, when Jesus cleanses, it’s not almost. There’s no

stain left. It's gone—it's gone. It's absolutely gone. And, when people learn about this, when people really begin to understand what I'm talking about, do you know what? They always want to write a song about it. "Grace that is greater than all my sin"; "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

Conclusion

How do you say goodbye to guilt? Confidence, contrition, confession, cleansing. And, what God calls clean, let no man call unclean.

Father, thank you for Your Word tonight. Seal it to our hearts. In Jesus' name.
Amen.

How to Say Goodbye to Guilt

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 29, 1998

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 38

“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.”

PSALMS 38:18

Outline

Introduction

I. The Tragedy of Guilt

A. Sin Displeases God

1. God Shows His Displeasure with Words of Wrath
2. God Shows His Displeasure with Arrows of Conviction
3. God Shows His Displeasure with a Hand of Pressure

B. Sin Dissipates Your Strength

1. Sin Wearies You
2. Sin Weights You
3. Sin Wounds You
4. Sin Worries You
5. Sin Wastes You

C. Sin Deadens Your Soul

1. It Spiritually Blinds You
2. It Spiritually Deafens You
3. It Spiritually Dumbs You

D. Sin Distances Your Friends

E. Sin Delights Your Enemies

II. The Remedy for Guilt

A. The Sinner's Confidence

B. The Sinner's Contrition

C. The Sinner's Confession

D. The Sinner's Cleansing

Conclusion

Introduction

We'll spend a few moments together tonight in the Word of God, in Psalm 38. Would you turn to it, please—Psalm 38? And, while you're turning, may I tell you that the deepest need—the deepest need—that most people in America—not a few, but most people in America—is this: they need to learn what to do with their guilt. As a matter of fact, a psychiatrist in California has said—listen to this: that “almost 100% of people who

are in mental institutions are there because they have not learned to cope with guilt”—not 100%, but almost 100%. You see, people who cannot handle guilt, who don't know what to do with guilt, have a terrible self-image. And, that self-image leads to depression. It sort of makes the soul sort of a yellow, dingy, grimy, grimy, window: when the light comes in, it's just all muddied up. The dirt and grime of guilt has distorted their whole outlook of life. And, sometimes this guilt eats away at an individual until it actually shows up as physical disease.

Now, you know, many people don't even know what guilt is. That's part of the problem in America. If you were to ask the average person, "What is guilt?" they would say, "Oh, that's the feeling you have when you've done something wrong." That is not guilt; that is the guilt feeling. If you put your hand on a hot stove, you will get raw skin and blisters. Now, the pain is the feeling of the blisters and the raw skin. The guilt feeling can never be adequately dealt with until you deal with the guilt.

The problem with modern psychology and modern psychiatry is this: we're trying to deal with the feeling; we're trying to deaden the pain. And so, sometimes a psychiatrist—now, we have some in our church; they wouldn't do this—but sometimes a psychiatrist would say, "You're taking life too seriously. You're putting burdens on yourself that you ought not to put on yourself. Maybe you need to have an extra-marital affair. Maybe you need a little fling. Whatever you do, don't go down there to Bellevue Baptist Church and let that Rogers heap guilt on you. Don't do that. Man, you're suffering enough with guilt." And so, what they're trying to do is to teach you how to put your hand on a hot stove and not feel the pain. They're never really dealing with the problem. And, not all psychiatrists are this way—not all psychologists are this way. But, there are certain humanistic, behaviorist psychologists and psychologists who do not understand how to deal with guilt. As a matter of fact, no psychiatrist and no psychologist can deal with guilt apart from the truth of the Word of God. I say that without stutter, stammer, fear, or apology. There is absolutely nothing that can deal with guilt apart from the grace of God. Now, I don't—I don't—stutter when I say that; I know that beyond the shadow of any doubt. What we're talking tonight is beyond—what we're talking about tonight is beyond—behaviorist and humanistic psychological psychobabble.

Now, David was a guilty man—King David. He committed a horrible and heinous sin. Somebody says, "Well, he was only human." No! He was culpable. He was guilty beyond a shadow of any doubt. And, he wrote Psalm 38 to show what his guilt had done to him and how he finally got relief and release. And, in Psalm 38, what we see here is the tragedy of guilt, but also the remedy of guilt.

I. The Tragedy of Guilt

Now, I want you to see what the tragedy of guilt is. Look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2: he says, *“O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore”* (Psalm 38:1–2).

A. Sin Displeases God

Now, what his sin had done—it had displeased his God.

1. God Shows His Displeasure with Words of Wrath

And so, from God there were coming words of wrath. Notice he says, *“Rebuke me not in thy wrath”* (Psalm 38:1). That is, “Lord, stop speaking. O God, You’ve been rebuking me in Your wrath.” The Holy Spirit of God, if you are saved, the Holy Spirit of God will rebuke you. When you’re a child of God, if you’re living in sin, I will guarantee you—I will guarantee you—the Holy Spirit of God will rebuke you with words of wrath.

2. God Shows His Displeasure with Arrows of Conviction

And, not only will there be words of wrath, there will be arrows of conviction. Notice verse 2: *“thine arrows stick fast in me”* (Psalm 38:2). If you’re a child of God and there’s sin in your life, as there was in David’s life, you are going to be pierced with such conviction that there will be pain in your heart. It’s as if God had pulled back the bow and released an arrow into your very flesh. There were, to David, words of wrath. There were arrows of conviction.

3. God Shows His Displeasure with a Hand of Pressure

And, also, there was a hand of pressure. Look, if you will, in verse 2: *“and thy hand presseth me sore”* (Psalm 38:2). Here’s God saying, “I rebuke you. In My wrath, I rebuke you.” Here’s God shooting this man through with an arrow of conviction. And then, here’s God holding this man in His hand and pressing him, and squeezing him, and squeezing him.

You know, some people have the idea that if you’re a child of God and you sin, God will toss you away. Oh, no—He does just the opposite. He doesn’t toss you away; He squeezes you just like that. In Psalm 51, David said, *“[Lord,] make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice”* (Psalm 51:8). Do you think he literally had broken bones? No, David is a poet. We use the same idiom today. We say, “I was just crushed—just crushed.” Now, now, what happened is this: that his sin displeased God.

Did you know that there are people who are members of this church who live high, wide, and handsome? They live in sin. They don’t feel any words of rebuke. They’re not pierced with any arrows of conviction. There is no pressure of God’s hand upon them. And, if you’re one of those in this congregation here tonight, God sent me here to tell you you’re lost, and you need to get saved—you need to get saved. When God saves

you, He doesn't fix you where you cannot sin any more. But, my dear friend, when you are a child of God, you're going to hear those words of wrath, you are going to feel those arrows of conviction, you're going to feel God's hand pressing you sore. If you do not, either you're lost or you're terribly, terribly backslidden.

B. Sin Dissipates Your Strength

Number two: Not only did this sin displease his God, but it dissipated his strength. David was one of the mightiest men in the Old Testament. I love the man David. We've named our son David after this man. We have a son—two of my sons are here with me right now—one named Stephen (named after Deacon Stephen in the New Testament); another, David (after this David).

1. Sin Wearies You

David was a mighty man; he was a man of strength, but I want you to see what sin did to his strength. Look in verse 3: *"There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones"* (Psalm 38:3). Write this down: his sin wearied him—it wearied him. He said, "There's no rest in my bones" (Psalm 38:3). You know why? The Bible says, "There is no rest, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21).

Do you have trouble sleeping? Now, there are some reasons for insomnia that go beyond this, but I'll tell you, many people cannot sleep just because they don't have a good conscience. A clear conscience, many times, will do far more good than a sleeping pill. Unresolved guilt will sap strength out of your life that ought to be given to productive purposes. You know what I do sometimes? I get in bed. I lie down. I think of the goodness of God, and I'll take a verse of Scripture, and I'll run it over in my mind. And, I'll just fold my hands *like this*, and look into the face of God, and say, "Lord, there's nothing between my soul and the Savior." I'm out just like that—asleep, asleep. Oh, how wonderful it is to be clear and to be clean! You say, "Oh, you think you're so good." No, I am what I am by the grace of God. I'm just giving a testimony. His sin, dear friend, it weakened him.

2. Sin Weights You

And, not only did it weaken him; it weighted him. Look, if you will, in verse 4: *"For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden"—"as [a] heavy burden"—"[they're] too heavy for me"* (Psalm 38:4). When you have a guilty conscience, it's like you're carrying around an 100-pound weight; it burdens you down. Why carry that load?

I was in Mexico one time, and Joyce and I—Mexico City—and we needed to get around. And, I saw a young Mexican there, had a beat-up old Volkswagen. I said, "May I hire you and your car?" He said, "All right." And so, he drove us around Mexico City in that old rattletrap Volkswagen. And, when we finished, we parked. I said, "Now, young

man, I want to talk to you,” and I told him about the Savior, and I prayed with him. And, he prayed and asked Jesus to come into his heart. And, I’ll never forget what he said. He said, “Mister, you know what happened to me?” He said, “It feels like I’ve been carrying around a load of rocks in a bag all my life, and I just sat them down—I just sat them down.” I’ll never forget it. Oh, the weight of sin! How wonderful it is to know that that weight is gone. His sin wearied him. His sin weighted him.

3. Sin Wounds You

His sin wounded him. Look, if you would, in verse 5: *“My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness”* (Psalm 38:5). Was this a physical wound? No, it’s a metaphor; he’s speaking metaphorically. He’s already said that God shot him full of arrows. And now, spiritually, he’s got gangrene. On the inside, now, he’s wounded. He has a wounded conscience and gangrene has set in.

You know, there are two kinds of wounds that can come to the human psyche: sorrow and guilt. Sorrow is a clean wound: given enough time, it will heal. And, I’m speaking to some here tonight who have a broken heart. It will heal. A clean wound will heal. Guilt is a dirty wound, and it will fester and fester and fester and fester until it is cleansed by God’s antiseptic, the precious blood of Jesus Christ. His sin wearied him. His sin weighted him. His sin wounded him.

4. Sin Worries You

And, his sin worried him. Look in verse 6: *“I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all...day long”* (Psalm 38:6). Now, here’s a man who is supposed to be the sweet singer of Israel. Here’s a man after God’s own heart, a man who was leaping and dancing and praising God when he brought the harp, the ark, into Jerusalem. And now, he says, “There’s no peace—there’s no joy—in my life. I’m a miserable man.” I’ve told you many times, *the most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man; the most miserable man on earth is a saved man, a saved woman, out of fellowship with God.* Is that not true?

Here was David, a man after God’s own heart, but read in verse 6 again: see, *“I am troubled; [I’m] bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long”* (Psalm 38:6). He had a guilty conscience. You see, he’d done something and was trying to hide it. He’d done something terrible. If they had telephone in that day, every time the telephone would ring, David would jump.

5. Sin Wastes You

Then, notice—not only that, but his sin wasted him. Now, verse—verse 7: *“For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh”* (Psalm 38:7). Now, he’s not speaking metaphorically. Probably David had venereal disease. He had a terrible disease in his loins, a physical disease, disgusting symptoms that come

when you have that kind of a disease.

You see, people today talk about safe sex. Sex is not supposed to be dangerous; it's to be sacred. It is to be beautiful. You say, "Did God forgive David?" Yes, and we're going to show you how in a moment. But, I want all you young people to listen to me and adults alike: God forgives—nature, never! God forgives—nature, never! David carried in his body, many scholars believe, a disease as a result of his sinful way. *Sin promises much, but it pays little*. Now, what I've said about David's sin was, number one, it displeased his God. Number two: It dissipated his strength. And, I've showed you all these ways that it did.

C. Sin Deadens Your Soul

Number three—and this is the tragic thing: It deadened his soul.

1. It Spiritually Blinds You

Continue to read in verses 9 and 10 of this same chapter: "*Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth*"—that is, he has palpitations of the heart—"my strength faileth me"—now, watch this—"as for the light of mine eyes, it...is gone from me" (Psalm 38:9–10). He was spiritually blind. Not physically blind—spiritually blind. Now, he's a man of God, but no longer is he dancing in the light. He's stumbling in the dark. He's outside the sunshine of God's love. He has no sense of direction. He... Now, the light has gone out of his eyes. He's blind to blessing.

2. It Spiritually Deafens You

But, not only is he spiritually blind; he's spiritually deaf. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "*But I [am] as a deaf man*"—"But I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Psalm 38:13). Verse 14: "*Thus I was as a man that heareth not*" (Psalm 38:14). We're going to find out in this psalm that David had many enemies out around him. But now, he is blind to blessing, and he's deaf to danger—blind to blessing, and he is deaf to danger. He's very vulnerable now, and he has given a place to the devil.

3. It Spiritually Dumbs You

And, he is blind, spiritually. He is deaf, spiritually, and he's also spiritually dumb. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "*But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth*" (Psalm 38:13). Sin had shut his mouth. This was the man who was the sweet singer. This was the man who could write psalms. This was the man who could testify of the grace, and love, and might, and power of God. Spiritually, he's blind. Spiritually, he's deaf. Spiritually, he is dumb. And, he's a child of God. Sin has deadened his soul.

D. Sin Distances Your Friends

But, I'll tell you what else it has done: sin has distanced his friends. Look, if you will, in verse 11: *"My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off"* (Psalm 38:11). They begin to treat David like a leper, and he was a moral leper. And, the word for *sore* here that he uses—you see it? "My sore"—is the same word for leprosy.

Now, why did people distance themselves from David? I'll tell you why. I've been around long enough to know this: that the most cantankerous, obstreperous, vituperative—what's another good word?—person that you can get away from is a backslidden Christian. God, deliver me. Give me a good old-fashioned, unsaved sinner for company rather than a backslidden Christian. You'll find them in churches. I can see them in churches. They get a bitter spirit. They begin to carp, and to criticize, and to find fault. I heard of a man—one time, he got drunk in the back of a saloon. And, some friends thought it would be great fun to rub Limburger cheese in his moustache when he passed out on some beer kegs, and they did that. And, when he woke up, he said, "It doesn't smell good in here. I'll go out and get some fresh air." And, he walked outside, and he picked a flower to smell that. And, he said, "Oh, that smells terrible." He picked up a little baby and said, "Here, Mother, you'd better take it." After a while, he came home and kissed his wife, and she didn't smell right. He said, "What's wrong?" He said, "The whole world stinks." Well, you know where the trouble was, don't you? And, you find these people who are constantly carping, and finding fault, and criticizing.

David, during this period of his time, had a critical spirit, and people just did not want to be with him. His friends, his lovers, his pals—they just simply distanced themselves from him. David had a judgmental, censorious, vituperative spirit.

E. Sin Delights Your Enemies

Then, not only that—not only did it distance his friends, but friend, it delighted his enemies. Look, if you will, in verse 12 of this chapter: *"They...that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long"* (Psalm 38:12). And then, notice verse 16: *"For I said, Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me"* (Psalm 38:16).

Did you know that we have enemies? They are satanically inspired enemies. And, the devil loves to get us to sin, and to fall, and to fail so that our enemies can rejoice over what has happened to us. They love to capitalize on the sin and the failure of God's people. That's one reason that I want to live a pure life and a holy life. I don't want to give the enemy occasion to blaspheme. And, I've said before, and I'll say again: I'd rather die by torture than to give the enemies of God an occasion to blaspheme.

Now, all of this is the very clear and a very honest statement of a man who had done wrong and who knew it. I'm thinking of another man right now who is the President of the United States. He's also made a confession and then hired a battery of lawyers to disprove the confession. There's something vitally wrong with that kind of confession. There's something vitally wrong with that kind of a spirit. Will God forgive? Yes, God forgives. But, God says in Psalm 51: *"A broken and a contrite [spirit]...thou wilt not despise [O God]"* (Psalm 51:17). And, David said, *"Against thee, [and] thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and...clear when thou judgest"* (Psalm 51:4). There's no double talk. Here is David coming to God and saying, "O God, this is what I've done. And, O God, this is what has happened to me."

II. The Remedy for Guilt

Now, what do you do with your guilt? How do you say goodbye to guilt? Because it's not just David or Bill Clinton—every mother's child in this building needs to learn how to handle guilt. And, we cannot wrap our robes of self-righteousness around us and say, "Faults in others I can see, but praise the Lord, there's none in me." Now, what happened to David, and how did he get clean? Well, first of all, there are four steps, and I want you to see them.

A. The Sinner's Confidence

First of all is what I want to call "the sinner's confidence." It's found in verse 15—look at it, if you will: *"For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God"* (Psalm 38:15). Now folks, don't pass that. David knew that he was a great sinner, but David knew for a multitude of sins, there was a multitude of mercies. And, he knew that he knew God, and he knew the nature of God; and he knew—he absolutely knew—that God would hear him. That's the reason I said this morning there's nothing you can do to make God love you any more or love you any less. He'll never stop loving you. You always have the hope of cleansing if you want it. There is no sin—none—that the blood of Jesus Christ cannot wash away. And, David said in another psalm, *"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51:7). Step number one: Confidence.

B. The Sinner's Contrition

Step number two—and here's the big one: Contrition. Look, if you will now, in 17 and 18—verses 17 and 18—of this same psalm: *"For I am ready to halt"*—that is, "I've come to the end of my rope"—*"and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin"* (Psalm 38:17–18).

You know, we have a cheap grace today that just says, "Oh well, if we admit that we've sinned, God will forgive us." Oh, no—that isn't what it says. It says, *"If we confess*

our sins, [he's] faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1:9). Do you know what the word *confess* means? It means "to agree with God about that sin—to see that sin as heinous, and hurtful, and hellish, and to say about that sin what God says about that sin, and to be broken." The Bible says that "*godly sorrow worketh repentance*" (2 Corinthians 7:10). You see, David knew that not only had he broken God's law; he had broken God's heart. And, what broke the heart of God broke David's heart.

Do you weep over your sin? Are you cavalier over your sin and just simply go giddily along? David was a great sinner, but, thank God, he was a great repenter. There was his confidence: he said, "O God, I know that You will hear me." And, there was his contrition: he wept over his sin. Look at it—verse 18: "*I will be sorry for my sin*" (Psalm 38:18). When he says, "I'm ready to halt," that means, "I have stopped my own self effort. I've come to the end of myself. I am sick and tired of this. O God, I am sorry, my God."

C. The Sinner's Confession

Step number three: After confidence and contrition is confession. Notice again in verse 18: "*I will declare mine iniquity*" (Psalm 38:18). What you cover, God will uncover; but what you uncover, God will cover. You must make a confession. Call it by name. Again, to confess means "to agree with." Notice how David confessed his sin in Psalm 51, verses 3 and 4—listen to it: "*For I acknowledge my transgressions...my sin is ever before me. Against thee, [O God, and] thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and...clear when thou judgest*" (Psalm 51:3–4).

Friend, there's one thing that God will not accept for sin, and that is an alibi or an excuse. Jesus did not die for alibis, nor did He die for excuses. Until you name it and nail it, you will never deal with guilt. Don't ever make this horrible mistake of coming to the end of the day and praying a prayer like this: "O God, if I have sinned, forgive me." You're wasting your breath. Now, if you want to pray something like, "Dear God, I was rude to my wife; forgive me," or, "Dear God, I told a lie; forgive me," or, "Dear God, I cheated; forgive me," or, "Dear God, I'm full of rotten pride; forgive me," He'll hear that prayer, because "*if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

D. The Sinner's Cleansing

Now, here's the fourth and final step: the first one, confidence; the second one, contrition; the third one, confession; and the final one—and thank God for it—cleansing. Notice, if you will, verses 21 and 22: "*Forsake me not, O LORD...my God, be not far from me. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation*" (Psalm 38:21–22). You know what the word *salvation* means? It means "deliverance"; it means "to be set free." He

says, “Lord, I know You will forgive me because You are my Savior. That’s the kind of a God You are, and I refuse to be haunted by the ghost of guilt.”

Conclusion

Now friend, there’s not a reason on earth, not one reason on earth—listen to your pastor—that you ought to go to bed tonight and not be perfectly clean—perfectly clean. There’s not a reason on earth that you ought not to start tomorrow morning, and lift your hands to Heaven, and say, “O God, I love You. Lord, there is nothing, nothing, nothing between my soul and the Savior.” And, when you do, dear friend, life will be rich, and full, and free. It doesn’t mean that you won’t have any problems. It doesn’t mean that you won’t have any pain. It doesn’t mean that you won’t hit a pothole and get your car out of line. It doesn’t mean that your children will make straight A’s in school. It doesn’t mean that you won’t have a bad hair day. It doesn’t mean those things. It just means in all of those things, you’ll say, “Right with God—right with God. He’s in here. He’s real in my heart and in my life.” There’s no reason at all that you should not live that way every day. It is your legacy—is what we have in Jesus. And, what a way to live!

Father, thank You for Your Word, and seal it to our hearts. In Jesus’s holy name.

The Singing Heart

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 4, 1984

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 40:1–3

“And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”

PSALMS 40:3

Outline

Introduction

- A. We Have Salvation in Christ
 - B. We Have Standing in Christ
 - C. We Have Singing in Christ
 - I. Praise to Reverence the Lord
 - II. Praise to Resist Satan
 - III. Praise to Release the Spirit
 - IV. Praise to Refresh the Saints
 - V. Praise to Reach Souls
- Conclusion

Introduction

Now, we’re talking today on “The Secret of Singing Saints”—actually, “The Singing Heart” is the title of our message. And, look with me, if you will, here in Psalms chapter 40. You’re going to find some wonderful verses. Those of you who are familiar with the Psalms know already what is in these verses, because they’re so lovely and so powerful. David said, *“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and [he] set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings...he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”* (Psalms 40:1–3)

Now, look up here a moment. I want to ask you a question: Do you have joy in your heart right now? Is there a song in your heart right now—I mean, a song welling up? Is there praise leaping from your being right now? “Well,” you say, “not particularly, Pastor. I had a bad night.” It makes no difference. You say, “It was raining this morning.” It makes no difference. You say, “Well, people are mistreating me.” It makes no difference. “Well, I’m sick.” Makes no difference. “Well, I need money.” Makes no

difference. Friend, there should be in your heart right now a song, and there should be joy in your heart this moment. And, you say, “Well, you’re not supposed to be filled with joy all the time.” I beg to differ. The Bible says, “*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*” (Philippians 4:4)

Now, you are to have a song. Now, that doesn’t mean that you’re going to be able to sing like Emily just sang. Very few of us can sing that way. But, I want you to know, when I get to heaven, I’m going to be able to sing better than Emily, because “*the last shall be first*” (Matthew 19:30) and I will be able to sing better than she when we get to heaven. What a day that’s going to be! But friend, I can carry a tune; I just can’t unload it. But, we still are to have a song.

You see, there’s two kinds of songs: there’s the song that you sing, and then there’s the song that you see. Look in verse 3 again: “*he hath put a new song in my mouth*”—that’s one kind of song—“*even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear.*” (Psalms 40:3) Thank God for the song that you can see even if you can’t sing it. The Bible says we’re to be “*singing and making [melodies] in [our hearts] to the Lord.*” (Ephesians 5:19) And, you can have that melody in your heart. And, every one of us ought to be a two-legged song in a major key. And, when people see our lives and when people are around us, they ought to be able not only to hear a song—but if they cannot hear it, at least to see it. Now, why do we have singing hearts? What is the secret of a singing saint? Where does this joy come from?

A. **We Have Salvation in Christ**

Well, look here. First of all, it comes because we are experiencing deliverance. Look in verse 40—chapter 40, verse 1: “*I waited patiently for the LORD; and...inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.*” (Psalms 40:1–2) Back in ancient days, sometimes they would make a prison in the field, and that prison in the field was nothing more than a deep pit. And, they would fill the pit with slime. The walls would be slippery. Many times, in that pit, if they wanted to torture an individual, they would put a wild beast, as they threw Daniel in a den of lions, or sometimes they would put a venomous serpent in that pit. And it would be a slippery, slimey pit, and the person, of course, could not grasp the walls and climb out. And, the more he struggled, the more he sank down into the mire. The only way that he could be delivered would be for someone in the pit to lift him out or someone out of the pit to pull him out. And, you see, this is what makes Christianity such a wonderful, wonderful faith—because Christ is the only One who can take us out of that pit.

Think of the religions of the world. In the jungles, there are people who worship the evil spirits; they call them animists. And, if an animist were to come and see you down

in that pit, when the animist looked in and he saw the venomous serpent that was in the pit with you—maybe a huge cobra or a rattlesnake—the animist would just turn and flee in terror back into the jungle. And, perhaps another would come along—this one Hindu—the Hindu would come along, and the Hindu would look at you in the pit and he would say to you, “That deep, dark, slimy pit is but the figment of your imagination, and you just need to say there is no pit and everything will be all right.” Big help that is. And then, the Confucianist—he would come along, and he would say, as he bumped his fingers—so wise: “Fall no fall in pit. From now on walk circumspectly, and you will not fall in pit.” A lot of help that is. And then, the Buddhist—he would come along, and he would say, “Now, the reason that you’re so unhappy is that you’re in the pit, and you don’t like being in the pit. You desire greatly to get out of the pit. Now, what you need to do is stop desiring to get out of the pit—have the cessation of all desire—and when your desires all cease, then you will be happy in the pit.” A lot of help that is. But, Jesus comes along, and the Lord Jesus comes down into that pit with us. “Him who knew no sin God hath made to be sin for us.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) The Lord Jesus stands between us and that poisonous serpent. The Lord Jesus takes the things of that serpent into his bosom, and, at the same time, the Lord Jesus lifts us out of that pit.

*From sinking sand He lifted me,
With [His own] hand He lifted me;
From shades of night to plains of light,
Oh, praise His name, He lifted me*

—CHARLES H. GABRIEL

You see, listen, folks, all of us—all of us—are going to have an unexpected pit stop some time. Did you know that? All of us are going to get in trouble some time, and even after we’re saved, sometimes we find ourselves slipping into a pit. You can get the catalog of the saints, and you can find out that Samson compromised and fell in the pit. Peter cursed and swore and fell in the pit. Jonah ran from the Lord and fell in the pit. John—Mark—turned his back on Paul and became a yellow turncoat, and he fell in the pit. Jacob cheated and connived and fell in the pit. Thomas doubted, and he fell in that pit. David sinned and committed adultery, and he fell in that pit. And, Abraham had a lapse of faith and lied about Sarah, his wife, and fell in the pit. But, every one of them were lifted. You see, not only does the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us; it keeps on cleansing. And, those of us who have known that deliverance and those of us who know that deliverance, then—dear friend, listen—it makes us want to sing. I cannot understand how anybody could know that his sins are forgiven—to see where he was and to know where he is now—and not want to sing about it, not want to praise the Lord. Let those who never knew our Lord refuse to sing, but children of the heavenly kingdom will shout and sing their praises abroad.

B. We Have Standing in Christ

And, you see, not only do we have salvation in Christ; we have standing in Christ. Look again, if you will: *“He brought”*—verse 2—*“He brought me up...out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and [he] set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.”* (Psalms 40:2) Thank God I am established in Christ. Thank God I have standing in Christ. It’s one thing to be brought up; it’s another thing to be led on. And, the Lord Jesus Christ now gives me a plan for my life, and I’ve a rock to stand on. And, I’m glad in these days I’ve got a rock to stand on. And, somebody said, “When everything else is moving, you need a solid place to stand, and Christ is that place. He is that rock. You may tremble on the rock, but the rock will never tremble under you.” And, *“the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”* (Psalms 37:23–24) What a wonderful, wonderful promise!

C. We Have Singing in Christ

These are things that have happened to the children of God. And, no wonder we’re filled with joy! No wonder we’re filled with praise! You see, we have salvation in Christ. We have standing in Christ. And, because of that, we have singing in Christ. Look again in verse 3: *“And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.”* (Psalms 40:3) Now, I want to talk to you about this praise today. And, I want to tell you how wonderful praise is, and I want to tell you what praise can do for you.

I believe one of the greatest men that ever lived in all of history was Dr. Robert G. Lee, former pastor of this church. Dr. Lee—if any of you have his autograph—when he would sign his name, underneath it he would put what? “Psalms 34, verse 1”—most every time, “Psalms 34, verse 1.” What’s so great about Psalms 34, verse 1? Well, here’s what it says—listen: *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* (Psalms 34:1) Now folks, if you get that out of the Bible into your heart, and out of your heart into your mouth, and out of your mouth as praise to God, you’re going to understand a marvelous secret. *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* (Psalms 34:1)

What is so wonderful about praise? What is this song that God has put in our heart? What will it do for us? I want to show you—I want to show you today, friend—five marvelous, glorious, wonderful things that praise will do for the child of God. Did you know that there’s more emphasis in the Bible on praising than there is on praying? And, praise is something that some of you have never really learned how to do. And, in my humble (but accurate) opinion, it’s the secret of the Christian life—learning to praise our great God. Let me tell you these five things that praise will do.

I. Praise to Reverence the Lord

Number one: Praise will reverence the Savior. It is praise that gives Him glory. The Bible says in Psalms 145, verse 10: *“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.”* (Psalms 145:10) Now, how many times have we prayed, “Lord, bless me. Lord, bless me. Lord, bless me”? Wouldn’t you like to bless the Lord? Wouldn’t you like to say, *“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name”*? (Psalms 103:1) Is it possible that mortal man can give Almighty God a blessing? Yes, you can bless the Lord. You can be of blessing to the Lord. You can give reverence to the dear Savior.

Oh, how my heart wants to praise Him! I tell you the great desire of my hearts is not to understand the Bible as much as it is to praise the Lord. The great desire of my heart is not to win souls as much as it is to praise the Lord. The great desire of my heart is not to pastor this church as much as it is to praise the Lord. Now, it’s not that these other things are not important, but I believe that the highest occupation of angels or men is to praise the Lord. The only reason we have churches is to praise the Lord. The only reason we know the Bible is to praise the Lord. The only reason we win souls is so they can praise the Lord, bless the Lord, praise the Lord. Dear friend, it is the occupation of angels around the throne; they are giving Him praise night and day. We were saved, that we might glorify Him—that we might praise the Lord. Now, so, I want you to understand that, first of all, we need to praise the Lord in order to reverence the Savior.

II. Praise to Resist Satan

Secondly, you need to learn today to praise the Lord in order to resist Satan—in order to resist Satan. Now, you have an enemy. He is very real, and he’s already made plans today to hurt you and your family. And, the fact that you’re oblivious to those plans and the fact that you don’t think that he’s made those plans—the fact that you think you’re quite secure—makes you very, very vulnerable. But, you see, when you begin to praise the Lord, in a strange way, that has power over the devil in ways that even prayer does not. Did you know that the devil is allergic to praise? Did you know that the devil hears our praise and the devil is repulsed by our praise?

Remember reading in the Bible about King Saul, who was the first king of Israel? And, King Saul had an evil spirit—a demonic spirit—that would come upon him from time to time. Young David understood the cure for that oppression through that demon spirit. When Saul would be oppressed by that demon spirit, David would get his harp and begin to sing, and pray, and praise the Lord. And, the Bible says that that evil spirit would be driven from Saul as David would praise the Lord. (1 Samuel 16:23) You see, the devil is allergic to praise—the devil is allergic to praise.

I was in a room the other day with Dr. Gray Allison, the president of Mid-America

Baptist Theological Seminary. He says, “Oh, what is that I smell?” He said, “I see what it is: it is eucalyptus.” He said, “I can’t stand eucalyptus, and,” he said, “I’m getting out of here.” There was a dried arrangement, and it was eucalyptus. He said, “It just...it just...it’s terrible.” He said, “I can’t stand it. I’m allergic to it. I’ve got to get out of here,” and he did. I tell you, the devil feels the same way about praise.

Did you know that, when we praise, the Lord is very, very present? Do you know what God’s address is? Psalms chapter 22, verse 3: “*[The Lord inhabits] the praises of [His people].*” (Psalms 22:3) That’s where God lives; that’s God’s address. God lives in the praises of God’s people. That’s the reason, when we praise the Lord, the Lord is near to those that praise Him. And, God occupies—He indwells—the praises of His people. As we pray, the Lord God comes near. And, when there’s the presence of the Lord, then there’s the absence of the devil. And, when people are praising the Lord, the devil just wants to saturate that place with his absence. The devil cannot stand the praises of God’s people. Now listen, if the devil is on your trail—and he is—one of the ways that you’re to know certain victory is to learn to praise the Lord.

Let me show you something very practical. Turn, if you will, to 2 Chronicles chapter 20 for just a moment—2 Chronicles chapter 20. It’s worth turning to, so go ahead—2 Chronicles chapter 20. Now, God’s people were in a difficulty, and they were in a difficulty because of an attack of the enemy. Now, it was a satanically inspired attack. Second Chronicles chapter 20, verse 1: “*[And] it came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.*” (2 Chronicles 20:1) Now, Jehoshaphat was the leader of Judah, and Judah was the tribe through which the Savior was to come. That was the messianic line. And, here was an attack of the devil. You’re going to have see the power behind the throne that came against Jehoshaphat and that came against Judah. This was an attack, obviously, of the enemy, and it was a strong attack, because the devil is very powerful. Look in verse 5: “*And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art...thou [not] God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in [thy] hand is there not power and might...that none is able to withstand thee?*” (2 Chronicles 20:5–6) Jehoshaphat said, “God, you’re able to solve and to settle any problem whatever.” And then, notice in verse 12 what Jehoshaphat said: “*O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do*”—and now, folks, just underscore this phrase; look at it—“*but our eyes are upon thee.*” (2 Chronicles 20:12) Don’t you love that? Don’t you love that? “Lord, we don’t know what to do, but God, our eyes are upon thee.” (2 Chronicles 20:12)

And about that time, Brother Tommy Lane, a minister of music had the answer. As a

matter of fact, God spoke—the only time it’s ever happened in history—to a minister of music. Just teasing Tommy. All right, now look, here’s where the Spirit of the Lord came on a Levite. Look in the last part of verse 14: *“a Levite of the sons of Asaph”*—that means a Levite who was particularly given to singing and to praise, a professional musician—*“came”*—and upon him came—*“the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said”*—here’s the message he said—*“And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude”*—and then, here’s another great statement, and boy, this chapter is full of them—*“the battle is not yours, but God’s”*—and then, look in verse 16—*“To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still”*—now, so many times we say, “Don’t just stand there; do something.” God says, “Don’t just do something; stand there”—*“stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.”* (2 Chronicles 20:14–17) Now, skip to verse 20: *“And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD...that [they] should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and...say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.”* (2 Chronicles 20:20–21)

Now, notice they weren’t singing to the people; they were singing unto the Lord. They were praising the Lord. Isn’t this a beautiful statement—*“that [they] should praise the beauty of holiness.”* (2 Chronicles 20:21) I think it’s one of the most beautiful statements—one of the most poetic phrases—in all of the Bible—*“that [they] should praise the beauty of holiness, [and] as they went out before the army...to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.”* (2 Chronicles 20:21)

Now, what happened when these people began to praise the Lord? Remember they’re under oppression from the devil. Verse 22: *“And when”*—underscore the phrase *when*—*“And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.”* (2 Chronicles 20:22) You say, “Well, if the Lord would deliver me, I’d praise Him also.” But, that isn’t what it says, friend. It says, “When they began to praise, the Lord delivered them.” (2 Chronicles 20:22) You say, “Well, Lord, just as soon as you start, I’ll start praising.” God says, “I’m not going to start until you begin to praise the Lord.” Now folks, when people praise the Lord, the devil can’t stand it. He’s allergic

to praise. He just has to saturate that place with his absence. And, you need to understand the power of praise—number one, to reverence the Savior; number two, to resist Satan. Satan hates the praises of God’s people.

III. Praise to Release the Spirit

Number three—let me give you a third reason: to release the Spirit—to release the Spirit. Now, just turn to Psalms 61 and verse 8. I was reading along, and when I came to this verse, I just had to stop and, well, as a matter of fact, I put a big star by it in my Bible and I underlined the entire verse—Psalms 61, verse 8. To me, it was just like a revelation to me. It was...it just blessed my heart when I saw it in my devotional reading. And, here’s what David says: *“So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.”* (Psalms 61:8) What else will praise do? Praise releases the Spirit. *“[Therefore] will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.”* (Psalms 61:8)

How are we going to do what God has told us to do? What are the vows that we’ve made? Well, we want to be soul winners. We want to be prayer warriors. We want to live victoriously. We want to do right. We want to show up. How are we going to perform our vows? David says, *“I [will] sing praise [to you], that I may daily perform my vows.”* (Psalms 61:8) Praise and performance are inseparably linked together. You want the power of God in your life? Do you want the release of the Holy Spirit in your life? You want God to give you power? You want God to give you strength? You want to be able to perform that which you know you ought to do? *“I will praise, that I might perform.”* (Psalms 61:8) That’s what he says—that’s what he says.

Folks, listen, I never try to preach a sermon till I praise the Lord. If you were to see me in my study before I leave, I just lift my hands and praise God, give Him victory, give Him glory, give Him majesty, and say, “Lord, I’m praising you, because Lord, I’m counting on you to live your life through me, and that the Holy Spirit of God would be released in my life and in my heart.” Praise reverences the Savior. Praise resists Satan. Praise releases the Spirit. *“Therefore will I praise, that I might perform.”* (Psalms 61:8) Oh, the power of praise in our hearts and in our lives!

IV. Praise to Refresh the Saints

I’ll tell you what else praise will do: praise will refresh the saints. Go back to Psalm 40 here, and look with me one more time—look at it. The Bible says here in Psalm 40: *“And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.”* (Psalms 40:3) Now, here’s a saint who’s happy. Here’s a saint who is refreshed. Here’s a saint with a song.

Did you know that many of God’s people are sick—mentally sick? Did you know that

we're having more Christians in hospitals, and in clinics, and in psychiatrists' offices more than ever before? Did you know that they are taking tranquilizers like salted peanuts? And, they're bowed down, and many of God's people have depression, a spirit of heaviness. Do you feel that way sometimes? You just don't feel like getting out of bed in the morning. You're tired—sick of everything. You feel lonely. You feel depressed. You feel negative. You feel discouraged. You feel defeated. You feel down. You've got the mulligrubs. Do you feel that way? Do you know what's wrong with you? You're self-centered—you're self-centered. You're all concerned about self. "I had a little party this afternoon at three; it was very small, three guests in all: I, myself, and me." You're concerned about yourself.

What happens when a person gets egocentric? What happens when a person gets self-centered? When a person gets self-centered and they get to dwelling on self, some things take place in their mind. When you're self centered, then you get very defensive; you've got to protect self. And then, because you're defensive, you get hostile. You're hard to live with, and because you're hostile, then you get aggressive. And, not only do you feel that people are doing things wrong to you, but you start to do things wrong to them to get even. And, you backbite, and you snap back. And, you do spiteful things, and you get argumentative. And, people withdraw from you, and you feel all the worse. And you're unlovely, and nobody wants to be around you. And, you feel sorry for yourself, and you get more defensive and more self-centered. You have a little pity party. Do you know what's wrong with most people who are just depressed? They're just self-centered—that's all. You see, self-centeredness is self-destructiveness. And, you say, "Preacher, you don't know enough about psychology and psychiatry to be telling us all of this." All right, let me give it to you from the Bible—Luke chapter 9 and verse 24: Jesus said, "*Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever [shall] lose his life for my sake [and the gospel's], the same shall save it.*" (Luke 9:24) Now, you know what that means? If you're self-centered, folks, it's going to destroy you. "*Whosoever [shall] save his life shall lose it: but whosoever [shall] lose his life for my sake [and the gospel's], the same shall save it.*" (Luke 9:24)

Now, let me tell you how you could put a lot of psychiatrists out of business. I thank God for the psychiatrist; they have their place. And, I thank God for their ministry, but a lot of Christians are going to psychiatrists who don't need to if they'd just learn how to praise the Lord. You see, when you praise God—when you praise God—you're no longer self-centered; you become Christ-centered—you become God-centered. Remember what Jehoshaphat said: "*Our eyes are upon [you].*" (2 Chronicles 20:12) Now, Jehoshaphat could have had his eyes upon the enemy and his eyes upon himself, but Jehoshaphat said, "Lord, our eyes are upon you. Lord, we're going to praise the beauty of holiness and the resplendent glories of God, and we're going to put our eyes

upon you.” And, when you do that—when you put your eyes upon the Lord—something very wonderful begins to happen: Christ is the center of your attention rather than bankrupt self; you become God-centered rather than self-centered, and that defensiveness, and that hostility, and that aggression, and that pity, and that depression—it has to go.

Listen to me—listen to me—there’s no one who can praise and sulk at the same time. It is impossible for praise and irritation to coexist in the same heart. If you want to refresh your life, if you want strength, if you want renewed vigor, praise the Lord. I tell you, dear friend, that time after time, when I get tired, I have learned just to lift my heart, my hands, my voice to God in praise, and His Spirit quickens my mortal body. The Bible says, “*The joy of the LORD [shall be] your strength,*” (Nehemiah 8:10) and His joy is our strength.

Let me show you a wonderful verse. This is worth turning to. Turn to Isaiah chapter 61. Let me show you something. Isaiah chapter 61—here’s what the Holy Spirit will do for you when He’s released in your heart: the Holy Spirit is given “*to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty*”—this is Isaiah 61, verse 3—“*to give unto them beauty for ashes*”—isn’t that a tremendous phrase, “beauty for ashes”?—“*the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.*” (Isaiah 61:3) Now, that’s what I’m talking about right now—the spirit of heaviness—depression. I meet them all the time—saints, just like this. They’re just bowed down—the spirit of heaviness. God wants to dress you up in the garments of praise; He wants you to learn how to praise the Lord; He wants to refresh you. Praise is the pause that refreshes—just to glorify the Lord. What will praise do? Praise reverences the Savior. He died for us. Praise resists Satan. Praise releases the Spirit. “I’ll praise, that I might perform.” (Psalms 61:8) Praise refreshes the saints.

V. Praise to Reach Souls

And, I’ll tell you very quickly one last thing that praise will do: praise reaches the lost. Look, if you will, in chapter 40 again—Isaiah...Psalms chapter 40. Turn to it one more time, and look in verse 3: “*he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and...trust in the LORD.*” (Psalms 40:3)

I want to tell you something: the best tool we have for evangelism, other than the preaching of the Word, is the praise of God’s people. Did you know that? That’s the reason we have a whole department of praise. We call it our “ministry of music”; it’s really the ministry of praise. We have several thousand enrolled in this ministry of praise. We put a lot of money, we put a lot of effort, we put a lot of people in the ministry of praise. Why? Because the ministry of praise is so important to reaching the lost. Listen, if a church is praising the Lord, God is present, Satan is absent, and there’s power there. But, besides that, there is attractiveness to praise. Did you know most of

the people in Memphis, Tennessee, are looking for joy? They're looking for fulfillment. They've tried everything; they haven't found it. And, when they come to the house of God, they're wanting to know, "Do these people have it?"

Now, take a man whose wife has badgered him and cajoled him, and finally, he comes to church. She says, "Please, honey, come just one time." And, he'll come, and sit almost in the back, and fold his arms, and look out from under his bushy eyebrows at me as if to say, "All right, you got a few minutes to work on me, and I'm never coming back." Well, suppose if he gets here and the service is dead, and the choir comes out there and sings something in Latin, and the song service sounds like a couple of calves dying in a hailstorm, and there's just no joy. And, the choir sings in Latin; the preacher preaches in Greek. Somebody says, "No wonder our people want to speak in tongues." And, there's just a spirit of deadness and defeat. And, an usher meets him at the door and gives him a snarl and a clammy handshake, if any. He's not going to come back. If you let a man come in a service, and brother, that usher greets him with a smile and a warm handshake and says, "Welcome, Brother, God bless you," he comes and he sits down, and the choir comes out here with the glory of the noonday sun on their face and they sing with the Spirit and with understanding, and the people around them are singing praises to the Lord, and the man of God stands behind the desk of God, opens the book of God, preaches the Christ of God and the power of God, he's—that man's going to look around and he's going to say, "These folks believe that stuff." Before long, he's going to be believing it, too.

I want to tell you, evangelism is as much caught as it is taught. The Bible says, "*Many shall see it, and fear*"—that is, they're going to have a reverence, and they're going to—"*trust in the LORD.*" (Psalms 40:3) Salvation is the result, many times, of the praises of God's people. Salvation is the result of praise. God, teach us to praise. Praise reaches the lost.

Conclusion

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Every head bowed, please. Every eye closed. Right now, I want to invite you to give your heart to Jesus Christ. I want to invite you to trust Him to save you. You see, you don't have anything to praise the Lord for until the Lord lifts you out of that miry clay, out of that horrible pit, but He'll do it today. The Lord Jesus will lift you from that sinking sand; He'll set your feet upon a rock; He'll establish your goings; He will put a song in your mouth, even praise unto our God if you'll trust Him.

How to Deal with Depression

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 20, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 42

*“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”*

PSALMS 42:5

Outline

Introduction

I. The Severe Problem of Depression

- A. Spiritual Dryness
- B. Continual Crying Jags
- C. A Sense of Shame and Defeat
- D. Lingering Memories
- E. Overwhelming Circumstances

II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression

- A. Look Inward with a Firm Look
- B. Look Upward with a Faith Look
- C. Look Onward with a Focused Look

Conclusion

Introduction

What Psalm 42 deals with is depression and what to do when you're feeling depressed, when you say, "I have fallen, and I can't get up"—not physically, but emotionally. You're down in the dumps. You're in despair. You're depressed. You say, "That's never happened to me, Pastor." Well, just hang on—hang on. You say, "Well, I am a Christian." If you'll study the history of the Christian Church, you'll find out that some of God's greatest saints have gone through a dark, deep night of depression. Now, this psalm is a wonderful psalm.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that depression is a billion-dollar-a-year business. That is, Americans are spending a billion dollars a year trying to do something with depression. Over 8 million Americans are so depressed they can't cope. They miss work. They drop out. Many of them name the name of Christ. And, by the way, it doesn't do much good to tell a depressed person, "Well, well, cheer up!" There's nothing they would like to do better than to cheer up. You just come along with some silly grin, and a slap on the back, and think you've done good—well, you haven't.

What do we mean by depression? Well, it's a passive, a listless, feeling—an overwhelming sadness. Nothing feels good. Nothing is worth feeling good about. It's a state of hopelessness—the idea that “I don't care, and no one else cares. No one understands me. No one accepts me.” And so, you're just filled with worry and anxiety. You might check up right now, some of you who are listening to me through television and others in this auditorium right now, you might be really in a state of depression. You seem to have lost all initiative. Maybe you have, when you get alone, just crying spells. Every now and then, you just heave with a sigh. You just maybe sometimes wake up in the middle of the night for no reason, can't go back to sleep. You feel fatigued, worn out. You wake up in the morning after a night's sleep, and you're still tired; and you kind of ache all over—not specifically anywhere, but mostly just all over. You get neutralized. You can't make decisions. You can't even trust your own wisdom or any body else's. You find yourself irritable and grouchy. You can't be enthusiastic about anything, and very frankly, you just wish the world would stop and let you off.

Well, let's look in this psalm. Look, if you will, in verse 42. The psalmist—chapter 42, verse 5—David asked this question: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*” (Psalm 42:5). He's talking here about depression—the severe problem of depression. Depression really can be a killer disease. In a study that I've done, I found out that depression is the second or third leading cause of death in some age groups. Not a bit uncommon to see a spouse die shortly after his or her mate has died. And, I want to say this: that David wrote this psalm—the sweet singer of Israel, a man after God's own heart! And, he says, “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*” (Psalm 42:5). He's speaking to himself, a man of God.

Call the role of the biblical saints; they got depressed. Moses got depressed—so depressed that he asked God to kill him. Elijah, a mighty prophet of God, running from Jezebel, in a time of extreme physical turmoil and mental anguish, sat down under a juniper tree and requested for himself that he might die. Jeremiah the prophet—I was reading amazing prophecies of Jeremiah this past week, and I read where Jeremiah said, “I wish I had died in my mother's womb.” (Jeremiah 20:14–17) A man of God said that! Even Paul the apostle, the mighty apostle, said he “*despaired even of life*” (2 Corinthians 1:8). Jonah, who preached that citywide crusade in Nineveh, where an entire city repented in sackcloth and ashes, even after having that incredible experience, asked God to take away his life. John the Baptist—Jesus said, “There's not a greater man born of woman than John the Baptist.” (Luke 7:28) John the Baptist got down in a dungeon; he got so depressed he even doubted that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

And, some of the secular world—people in the secular world, great leaders—have been depressed. Sir Winston Churchill, the man that we remember who said, “Never

give up! Never, never, never give up!”—that’s what he said from the platform, but he had severe bouts of depression. He called it “a black dog that hounded him.” And, in the ministry, I don’t guess there’s a greater preacher that ever lived, outside the Apostle Paul, than Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a man of wit and warmth; and yet, all of his biographers tell that there were times when Spurgeon would get into deep fits of despondency and depression. It’s also true of Martin Luther, the mighty reformer. And, I’m not saying it’s good, but I’m saying if you get depressed, you’re in good company. I mean, there are a lot of folks in the Bible and out of the Bible—in the spiritual world, in the secular world—who have a session with depression. And, it’s a very severe problem.

I. The Severe Problem of Depression

Now, David—I assume that David wrote this psalm. You know others than David wrote psalms also. There’s no superscription that says who wrote it, but I assume that David wrote it. And, if he did write it, he had plenty of reason to be depressed. I mean, after all, David had a son, Absalom, that rebelled against him—a son that he loved with all of his heart. And then, this rebellious son also is killed, and David, now, is deposed as the king. He’s had to flee for his life. He’s living like a partridge on the mountainside—hunted. He has no power. He has no possession. He’s been deposed. He sinned against God. He’s committed a horrible sin. He’s lost a child by death. He’s had a daughter that was raped, a son who had done the dastardly deed. He had a wife that was raped—now, another son killed. Nation is in turmoil. Outwardly, he had some reason to be depressed. And, as you look at this psalm and as you study this psalm, you’ll find out that the man who wrote this psalm gives almost a clinical case of severe depression.

A. Spiritual Dryness

Look at it—verses 1 and 2: “*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*” (Psalm 42:1–2). Write down “spiritual dryness”—“spiritual dryness.” Here’s a man who says, “God, I’m so thirsty for You, but I can’t find You. I’m like a deer hunted by a pack of wild dogs. God, where are You? God, have You forgotten me?” Look, if you will, in verse 9: “*I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?*” (Psalm 42:9). Now, God had not forgotten him, and God has not forgotten you. But, he felt like God had forgotten him. I was talking to a preacher who had been in a church for a long time, and they weren’t treating him too well. And, he said, “I know that God put me here, but I just wonder if He remembers where He put me.” That’s what David felt: “God, You have forgotten me.” There’s a spiritual dryness.

B. **Continual Crying Jags**

And then, there...he's on continual crying jags. Look, if you will, in verse 3: *"My tears have been my meat"*—that is, "my food"—*"day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"* (Psalm 42:3). Continual crying jags. Now, we all cry. We all—we all—have sorrow. We all have heartaches. That comes, but that's not depression.

The sorrows—the normal tears that we all shed—that's like a thunderstorm. But, when a person gets in a depression, it's like a front that moves through and just camps overhead. It's just a continual drizzle, just a continual dropping. That's that sorrow where my tears have been my food day and night.

C. **A Sense of Shame and Defeat**

Look again, if you will, in verse 3. He has a sense of shame and defeat. Look in the last part: *"while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"* (Psalm 42:3). There's a feeling that he's let God down, has a feeling that he's such a miserable example of a Christian. He feels so ashamed. He has no witness; he has no testimony. What a sense of guilt he has over that!

D. **Lingering Memories**

All right. Spiritual dryness, continual crying, feeling of shame—and then that's compounded by lingering memories of what used to be—lingering memories. Look, if you will, in verse 4: *"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with the multitude that kept holyday"* (Psalm 42:4). He's looking backward—looking backward—to some better time when he used to have joy, used to have peace, satisfaction, friends, fellowship, and worship. And, it was so real to him, and now it's only a memory that haunts him. And, he thinks, "It never can be this way again," and that just makes the sadness of the presence—the present—all the worse, because it's set against this background.

E. **Overwhelming Circumstances**

And, the sum total of all of that is just overwhelming circumstances. Look in verses 6 and 7: *"O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan"*—underscore that—*"and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and...billows are gone over me"* (Psalm 42:6–7). What is the imagery here? This is poetry, but what's he talking about? He's having thoughts of death. He talks of Jordan. Jordan, in Bible typology, speaks of death. Jordan starts up there at Mt. Hermon—beautiful, snowcapped all year round. It bubbles up there and comes and trickles down, and it runs that torturous route down to the Dead Sea—the Dead Sea, 1,300 feet below sea

level at its surface and 1,300-foot-deep, the lowest spot on the face of the earth. And, the river Jordan runs down from the snowcapped mountains of Mt. Hermon all the way down to the Dead Sea, and it buries itself there, never to rise again. And, Jordan speaks of death.

He says, “All thy waterspouts have gone over me” (Psalm 42:7). What does he mean by “waterspouts”? He’s talking about waterfalls. I’ve been up there, if they had waters of the Jordan. One of the most beautiful waterfalls you will ever see on this earth is right up there. I’ve stood there and looked at this torrential water coming out. And, David says, “This river of death has come over me.” He’s thinking about death, I believe. And, when you get despondent enough, you think maybe death would be a welcome release. That’s the reason why we’re having such a plethora of suicide today.

I was reading what a 16-year-old said just before he committed suicide. It was so sad. I want you to listen to it. He wrote a note to his parents—at least, his parents found it. He said, “Dear world, I don’t want to get my hair cut. I don’t want to tend to kids. I don’t want to see Tina at school Monday. I don’t want to do my biology assignment, or English, or history, or anything. I don’t want to be sad, or lonely, or depressed anymore. I don’t want to eat, drink, talk, breathe, sleep, move, feel, or live anymore. Mom and Dad, it’s not your fault. I am not free. I feel ill. I’m sad and lonely”—16-year old. That’s depression. That’s the way David was saying: he was saying, “God, all Your waterspouts have come over me. I feel the chilly waters of Jordan washing over me.” He’s depressed. “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*” (Psalm 42:5). The severe problem of depression.

II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression

Now, the spiritual provision for depression. Do we have to be depressed? Is there no hope? Have we fallen and, indeed, can we not get up? No, there’s hope. I want you to see, first of all, what you need to do when you’re depressed. Now, you may not be clinically depressed, but you may be on the margin. You may be on the bubble. You may be just mildly depressed. You may be just having a bad day, but this will apply to you wherever you are on that continuum.

A. Look Inward with a Firm Look

Number one: Look inward with a firm look. Notice verses 5 and 6: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? ...why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar*” (Psalm 42:5–6). Now, what’s he saying? He’s beginning to look inward. He’s beginning to talk to himself. His soul is the man, the person—the soul, the mind, the

emotion, and the will. Did you know there's someone in you that's always talking to you? I mean, there's the old flesh nature in you. There's that old man, and he is constantly talking to you; and that's where negative thinking comes from—that mindset that we inherited from Adam. That soul is talking, saying, "You deserve this. You can never be better. You ought to have a pity party. You'd be better off dead." Your soul is just talking to you 'cause always... They're always talking.

Do you know what you need to do? You need to talk back—you need to talk back. That's what David does: he takes his soul by the scrap of the neck, rings it up, looks it in the face, and says, "Why are you this way, O my soul?" (Psalm 42:5). I mean, he has an inward look, and it is a firm look. "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" (Psalm 42:5). He just talks back to himself.

You ever talk back to yourself? Do you ever talk to yourself? One man said, "I am concerned about my wife. She always talks to herself." His friend says, "Does she know she's doing it?" He says, "Oh, no. She thinks I'm listening to her." Do you ever talk to yourself? You ought to. I mean, it's...you're not wacko if you do that. David is talking to himself. He is taking a firm inward look. He's doing some spiritual analysis. He's asking himself this question, "Why am I depressed? Why am I depressed?" You need to ask yourself that question. You can answer it perhaps better than anybody else 'cause nobody knows you like you. "What man knows the spirit of a man save the spirit of man that's in him"—"the things of man save the spirit of man that's in him" (1 Corinthians 2:11). So, you need to look yourself in the face and ask yourself this question: "Why am I depressed?" And, be honest.

You might be depressed because of the death of a loved one, and you're bereaved. That might be the cause of your depression, and you need to recognize it. You might be depressed because you're brokenhearted. Somebody has rejected you and done you wrong. Maybe it's your child—it's your parent. Maybe it's your husband. Maybe it's your wife. Maybe it's your sweetheart. Maybe you've had a broken relationship. Maybe you've lost something very valuable to you. Might be your health, might be your job, might be your reputation—but you've lost something. You don't see how you'll ever get it back. Maybe you're depressed because you feel guilty, the grime of guilt has dirtied up the windowpanes of your spiritual house; and everything just sort of looks yellowish-gray as you look out. I mean, think about it. Ask yourself this question: "Why am I so depressed?"—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (Psalm 42:5).

Did you know it just might be that you're in bad health? If you have what I would call, or what I have described as, "severe clinical depression," let me ask you, first thing—just go get a checkup. You know, what you may need it just a vacation. I mean, you just may need some vitamins and a better diet, a little rest, or you may have these other problems, and your poor health is compounding these other problems. I don't know, but

you know. So, first of all, the first thing is look inward with a firm look. Don't tiptoe around it. Look yourself straight in the eye. Ask your soul, "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*" (Psalm 42:5).

B. Look Upward with a Faith Look

Second look you need to take: look inward with a firm look, and then look upward with a faith look. Look, if you will, in verses 7 through 9: "*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts*"—that is, "the deepest emotions of my heart are crying out to You, O my God"—"*all thy waves and billows are gone over me. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life*"—here's the key verse: verse 9—"*I will say unto God my rock*" (Psalm 42:7–9). Look upward with a faith look. Whether you understand it or not, whether you've analyzed it correctly or not, look to Him, because He will never fail you.

I read recently where Abraham Maslow, the famed research analyst, said this—it was shocking when I read it: he said, "The truth is that the average American does not have a real friend in the world." Now, you think everybody has one? He says, "The average America doesn't have one real friend." Every Christian does. What a friend we have in Jesus—what a friend we have in Jesus! He is your rock. When you look inward with a firm look and and try to analyze, look upward with a faith look. Look to Him. There is absolutely no real lasting cure for depression other than putting your eyes upon the Lord. Now, if that seems simplistic to you, friend, it's only simplistic because of the hardness of your heart.

Notice how God is described in verses 8 and 9: "*Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life*"—underscore "my life"—"*I will say unto God my rock*" (Psalm 42:8–9). He is your life, and He is your rock. Now, one verse speaks of His tenderness, His lovingkindness. The next verse speaks of His strength. He's a rock. Have you ever heard of a tender rock? Hmm? That's what God is: He is a tender rock!

Here's a verse for your margin right here; put this in your margin so you can read it when you get home: Psalm 147, verses 3 and 4. The psalmist is talking about God, and I want you to notice how he juxtaposes tenderness and strength. It says of him, "*He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds*"—now, that's a picture of TLC, tender loving care. And then, in verse 4 it says—"*He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names*" (Psalm 147:3–4). How many stars are there? You say, "Pastor, you don't know." No one knows. There are billions and billions and quadzillions, or whatever number you can think of, of stars. They just go on and on and on into infinitude. God will tell you about every one of them: where they're located, the size, their weight, their brightness, their magnitude. And, He's got a name for every one of

them. He has given a name to every star in the universe. And yet, He's the One who binds up your wounds. Now, that's the tender rock. That's how great God is.

You see, if you think about it, everything big is made up of something little. Our material world is made up of atoms. Atoms are so small that you could put 25 trillion of them side by side within an inch. And, the mighty universe is made up of atoms. And so, it's the God of bigness who is the God of smallness. And, the God who runs this universe attends the funeral of every sparrow. "Not a sparrow falls but what God knows about it" (Matthew 10:29). He's the tender rock.

What I'm trying to say to you is this: don't get the idea that God doesn't care about you. "*The very hairs of your head are...numbered*" (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7). He is your God, and if nobody else understands you, if you don't have a friend anywhere, if you cannot see a solution, He will not fail you. When you take the inward look, then take the upward look and look to Him. This is not a platitude. I'm not just trying to tell you something that a preacher might say that doesn't work. I am telling you that your hope is God, and you need to look to Him in faith. If you put your faith anywhere else, sooner or later, you're going down.

We had a hurricane that has just danced up the east coast of Florida. We had one not just a few weeks ago that came ashore. When I was a boy living down there in West Palm Beach, it seemed like for a while, in the fifties, the hurricanes seemed to come right across Palm Beach and West Palm Beach. And, when a hurricane would come, of course, we would take everything loose in the yard and bring it in the house and the shed, and then we'd go up and nail shutters up all over the windows. But, there were some things we couldn't bring inside by the very nature of the thing, so we'd get rope and tie it down so it wouldn't get blown away. But, the problem was, sometimes you'd come out, and those winds would exceed one hundred miles an hour. And, the thing that you had tied down was blown away, and the thing you tied it to was blown away, also. You know, you'd better tie your life to something that can stand. There is a rock, and that rock is God Himself. He cannot—He will not—be moved.

Now, you say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, you mean if I come to God in all my troubles, He'll explain it to me, and I'll understand?" Nope, you may not understand. Look in verse 9: "*I will say unto God my rock, Why [have you] forgotten me?*"—in other words, here, he is...he's saying—David is so wise in this psalm—he's saying, "Lord, I don't understand. Why have You left me like this?"—"Why [do] I [go] mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?" (Psalm 42:9–10).

Now, you know, as a pastor, there's one question that I'm asked over and over again when I meet people in depression: they say, "Pastor, why, why did this happen? Why? Why'd my husband die? Why? Why do I lose my job? Why? Why did the doctor...?"

Why? Why? Why?” Well, *why* is not your question; it’s *how*. *Why* is God’s question. How are you going to react? That’s your question. God’s ways are not your ways (Isaiah 55:8). Many of God’s choicest of saints have gone through periods of deep darkness, and they couldn’t understand why; and David was one of them. In the very verse that he tells God that God is his rock, he’s also saying, “God, I don’t understand.” Someone has well said that “life is not a problem to be solved; it is a mystery to be lived”—“not a problem to be solved, a mystery to be lived.” And, Warren Wiersbe has reminded us that “we do not live by explanations; we live by promises.” So many people, you know, they figure, “Well, if there is a God, why has He let me down?” He’s not let you down. As a matter of fact, if there has something that has happened to you that you cannot understand, think what an incredible opportunity for trust that is in you.

Robert Frost, I think, said it perfectly: he said, “It was of the essence of the trial that you shouldn’t understand it at the time. It had to have un-meaning to have meaning”—“it was of the essence of the trial that you couldn’t understand it! It had to have un-meaning to have meaning.” You say, “Pastor, I don’t think I understand that.” What he is saying is that if God explains it all to you, it kind of ceases to be a trial. But, if you say, “God, I don’t understand it. Lord, why have You forsaken me? Yet You’re my rock.” Then, you’re coming to the place that Job came to when he said, “*Though he slay me, yet [shall] I trust...him*” (Job 13:15). The sainted Andrew Murray said this (the old saint of God)—listen to it: “in times of trouble, God’s trusting child must say first, ‘He brought me here. It is His will that I am in this straight place’; next, ‘He will keep me here in His love, and He will give me His grace in this trial to behave as His child’; then, ‘He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn, and working in the grace He means to bestow’; last, ‘in His good time, He can bring me out again—how and when He knows.’” Say, number one: “I’m here by God’s appointment”; number two, “in His keeping”; number three, “under His training”; number four, “for His time.” God is too good to be unkind, too wise to make a mistake. When we cannot trace His hand, we can trust His heart. That’s good—that’s good. That’s what David is saying: “*I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?*” (Psalm 42:9). “God, I’ve got so many questions, but You are my rock.”

C. Look Onward with a Focused Look

Now, thirdly, and finally, and quickly: Look—take the inward look, the firm inward look; take the faith-upward look; and finally, take a focused onward look. Notice verse 11. “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him*” (Psalm 42:11). That’s...he’s looking to the future: “I am coming out! I do have a hope! I will hope in God, no matter how bleak it is, no matter how dark it is, no matter how despairing it is. I will hope in God, and I have hope.”

Friend, there are only two places where there is no hope: one is in Heaven when you don't need it because faith has turned to reality, and the other's in Hell where people have no hope. But, as long as there is a God, there is hope.

And, I want to tell you today, if you're depressed and listening to me, hope in God. Say, "You, O Lord my rock...and I will yet praise You. By Your grace and in Your time, You'll turn every hurt to a hallelujah, every tear to a pearl, every midnight to a sunrise, and every Calvary to an Easter. I will yet praise You! I will!" And, don't you lose hope. It may be that God is taking everything else away from you because you can trust in Him and hope in Him alone to bring you to verse 11: "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?...why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him*" (Psalm 42:11).

St. Augustine asked this question; it's one of the most penetrating questions I've ever heard: he said, "Suppose God were to come to you and God were to offer you a contract, a deal, and God were to say to you, 'You can have whatever you want. You will live everlastingly. You will have all power. Every longing will be satisfied. Nothing will be a sin to you. Nothing will be forbidden to you. You can have everything you want, as much as you want—joy, peace, long life, success, everlasting life—you can have anything you want, with this one exception: you will never see My face.'" Augustine asked, "Would you take that deal?" And, he said, "If you would say, 'No,' then you have the pure love of God. But," he said, "If a chill went over your soul when you heard that phrase, 'You will never see My face,' he said, "thank God, because you're saying, 'God means more to me than all this world and all the universes put together.'"

You see, I don't think that God is really finished with us until our chief delight is God alone and when our chief delight is God alone, no matter how dark, how deep, how dismal, how despairing—when God and God alone is our chief desire, and we'll say, "I don't care what happens. He is God! And, I will yet praise Him and seek His face." Take a firm inward look. Take a faith upward look. And, take a focused future look. If you're depressed, I beg you, in the name of Jesus, don't let Satan blow out the light of hope in your heart and in your life! He is not finished with you.

Conclusion

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. If you would like to know this God—no one moving please—you would like to know this God, you'd like to be saved, I want to invite you to pray a prayer like this: "Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. Jesus, I believe You're the Son of God. I believe, Lord Jesus, that You paid for my sin with Your blood on that cross. I believe that God raised You from the dead. You promised if I would trust You, You would save me, and I do trust You." Would you tell Him that? "I do trust You right now, with all of my

heart. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Lord Jesus.” Pray it and mean it: “Save me, Lord Jesus.”

Did you ask Him? Now, I want you to seal it by praying this: “Lord Jesus, I am trusting You to save me, and because I’m trusting You, I’ll make it public. I’ll not be ashamed of You because You died for me. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

Now, look up here. When we believe in Him, we receive Him; and when we receive Him, we confess Him—to believe, to receive, to confess. We’re going to sing a little chorus, a little song: “Lord, I believe, Lord, I receive, Lord, I confess you now,”

And, if you prayed that prayer with me, or you’re willing to pray it, when we sing, I want you to leave your seat and come forward. Standing at the head of each of these aisles will be a minister, a friend, and I want you to come and tell him, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Listen—listen to me now: just come right down one of these aisles and say, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Your very coming will be your way of saying, “I’m not ashamed of Him.” We want to receive you, to rejoice with you, to give you some scripture, to answer any question you may have, and to seal your decision in prayer. Now, if you’re in that balcony up there, because of the distance, there’ll be someone up there in the balcony to receive you. All along that wide aisle, well, you just come to Him, and just say, “I’m trusting Jesus.”

Now, there’s another category of persons I want to invite to come forward, and these are the ones who need a church home. And, I want to invite you today, if you are saved already, and you know that you’re saved, and you believe as we believe, and you want to join us to help tell this world that Jesus saves, and you want to be a part of the Bellevue family of faith and friends, I want you to come forward at this same time, if you’re saved already, and tell the minister that you’d like to place your membership here. And, he’ll tell you how you may become a member of this family of faith and family of friends.

So, some are coming, saying, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Others are coming, saying, “I want to place my life and service, my membership, here.” I’m gonna ask, when we stand and sing, please don’t leave during the invitation. You’ll disturb others. Be in a spirit of prayer. Let’s stand together. “Lord, I believe.”

How to Get Up When You're Down

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 31, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 42:5–11

*“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”*

PSALMS 42:5

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Serious Problem of Depression
 - A. Spiritual Dryness
 - B. Continual Weeping
 - C. Shameful Defeat
 - D. Lingering Memories
 - E. Overwhelming Circumstances
- II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression
 - A. Look Inward and Analyze Your Heart
 - B. Look Upward and Recognize Your Help
 - C. Look Onward and Realize Your Hope
- III. The Sure Promise in Depression

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you find, please, Psalm 42, and in a moment we're going to begin reading in verse 5. And, what we're going to do today is to have a session on depression: how to get up when you've fallen and think you cannot get up. I'm not talking about having fallen physically, but emotionally, spiritually—when you're down and don't seem to be able to get up. Now, I'm not just talking about feeling bad about certain things.

Somebody asked a lady, “What do you do when you get down in the dumps?” She said, “When I get down in the dumps, I get a new hat.” Her husband said, “I wondered where you'd been getting them.”

There are times when we get discouraged when we are unhappy about things. Maybe we lose a job. Maybe we have an automobile accident. Maybe somebody says something bad about us. And, we're down. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not

talking about when the upright get uptight about this or that. I'm talking about depression, a deep mood of despair. And, it's something that is so terrible, so horrible. It is a matter that sometimes sends people to hospitals, or sometimes causes them to drop out of society. We feel bad sometimes—that's like a thunderstorm that comes and then it goes. But, depression is like a lingering fog that takes all of the sunshine out of our lives.

I. The Serious Problem of Depression

I want you to think with me, first of all, what I'm going to call the serious problem of depression. Look, if you will, in verse 5: *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?"* (Psalm 42:5). Now, David wrote this. And, David is cast down, and he's talking with himself. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that depression is more than a billion dollar a year industry—people who are being treated by depression. And, according to the research I did for this message, there are millions—millions—of Americans who are depressed. And, don't tell a person like that "cheer up." They've done everything they know, and nothing would make them feel better than to be able to cheer up. But, they can't do it. The serious problem of depression.

I want to give you a list that I found that describes what depression is. Are you ready? Let's see if you, friend, are depressed. Depression is a passive or listless feeling, a continual feeling of sadness, an attitude of "nothing feels good or is worth feeling good about," a state of constant hopelessness, a feeling that "no one cares" or "no one understands" or "no one really accepts me," continual worry and anxiety. That's depression.

Would you like to check yourself up and see if you are depressed? Well, here's a list. Have you lost all initiative? Perhaps suddenly or slowly, you've just kind of thrown in the towel. Do you have repeated crying spells for apparently no cause? Do you find yourself awakening suddenly at night, not able to go back to sleep? Do you wake up in the morning feeling fatigued and kind of dread to face the day ahead? Do you feel pain, sort of a scattered pain, unspecific, aching all over? Do you find yourself sometimes thinking about your own death and afraid that you might have thoughts of suicide? Do you find yourself sometimes—*huhhhhhh*—sighing like that—just a heavy, heavy feeling in your chest? Have you come to the place where you distrust your own wisdom and have unusual trouble making decisions—you second-guess yourself? Do you find yourself sometimes irritable and find yourself cross with others, and no legitimate reason for it? Do you find yourself unable to be enthusiastic about anything? That's not my list. That's someone else's list. But, that is a description of people who are depressed.

“Well,” you say, “pastor, I don’t need the message this morning. I’m not depressed.” Well, somebody you know needs it. And, somebody that you can minister to needs it. Or, you may need it. It’s in the Word of God: How can you get up when you get down?

Now, it is a killer disease. Depression puts many people in the hospital and quite a few in the grave. It is the third leading cause of death in certain categories and age groups. Those of us who have been in the ministry long enough know that sometimes when we go to the graveside to bury a spouse, before long we’ll have the funeral for the other.

“Well,” you say, “these are the unsaved people. They don’t know what we know.” No, let me tell you something. God’s people are not immune from depression. Moses, that great leader of God’s people, got so depressed that he prayed and asked God to kill him. Jonah, the mighty prophet of God, did the same thing and asked God to take away his life from him. Elijah sat under a juniper tree and wished for himself that he might die. The great Apostle Paul talked of himself of being depressed or in a state where he despaired even of life. John the Baptist got down in a dungeon—not only a literal dungeon, but a dungeon of despair so great that John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, even doubted that Jesus was the Messiah.

And, in history, great men of history have gotten depressed. Charles Spurgeon—those of us who are preachers think of Charles Spurgeon, perhaps, as the greatest preacher who ever lived—but Charles Spurgeon, the great Spurgeon, a man of wit and warmth, had times of depression.

And, we think in the political realm of great leaders. Winston Churchill, the man who saw England through the Second World War, an indomitable leader, sometimes had fits of depression so great that he just closed up shop. He called that depression “a black dog that chased after him.”

David wrote this Psalm—now, King David, a man after God’s own heart—and he says in verse 5, *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?”* Outwardly, when this happened, David had every reason to be depressed. He’d lost a son that he dearly loved. That son’s name was Absalom. Absalom had turned against David, betrayed David, tried to take the kingdom from David. And, David had to flee for his own life. Then, Absalom is killed, and David weeps and says, “O Absalom, Absalom! My son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, Absalom!” (2 Samuel 18:33). Now David is fleeing from his life, meant to be a king. He’s lost his wealth. He’s lost his home. He’s lost his power. He’s lost his financial support. On top of all of that, David had sinned against God. He committed a terrible, horrible sin, and he lost a child that he loved, an infant child. And then, he had a daughter that was raped. He had a wife that had been assaulted. And, he had another son that was killed. And, the nation that he was supposed to be king over was in turmoil.

I say, outwardly, David had a reason to be cast down. Things could not have looked bleaker for David when he wrote Psalm 42. *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?”*

Now, let’s look at this Psalm, and it’s almost a clinical case of depression.

A. Spiritual Dryness

First of all, David had what I want to call spiritual dryness. Look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2: *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psalm 42:1–2). He’s thirsty for God, but he feels God is afar off. He feels like a wild deer being hunted by a pack of dogs. He feels the spiritual dryness. He feels his soul shriveling up. And, he thinks perhaps God has even forgotten him.

Look, if you will, in verse 9: *“I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?”* (Psalm 42:9). Here he is thirsting for God, but God seems a billion light years away. *“Where are you, God? Why have you forgotten me?”* Spiritual dryness. Now, God had not forgotten him. That’s not the issue. He felt that God had forgotten him.

B. Continual Weeping

And then, continual crying jags. Look, if you will, in verse 3: *“My tears have been my meat”—or “my food”—“day and night”* (Psalm 42:3). David is weeping—uncontrollable weeping. This is the mighty man of God. Now, we all have blue moments; we all have times of sadness, but not continual weeping. That’s the mark of depression: not like a summer shower that falls and then passes away, but like the lingering, continually dropping on a foggy day.

C. Shameful Defeat

David has shame; he feels defeated. Look in the last part of verse 3: *“My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?”* (Psalm 42:3). He knows that his enemies now are mocking him. He’s ashamed. He feels he’s a poor witness for Jesus Christ. And, indeed he was. You know, some of us try to witness, but we don’t have joy, and we don’t have victory, and that just increases our shame. David’s sense of guilt made him feel that he’d disgraced God.

D. Lingering Memories

That’s compounded by lingering memories. Look, if you will, in verse 4: *“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday”* (Psalm 42:4). He looked back on better days. He looked back on days when he had joy and peace when with the multitude he was praising God in the house of God. And, all of that is now just a memory. It’s not real to him anymore. It seems to make his distress all the more real, for he feels those good times that he once

had are not lost forever.

E. Overwhelming Circumstances

On top of that, he just has overwhelming circumstances. Look, if you will, in verses 6 and 7: *“O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts.”*—write in your Bible there, “waterfalls”—*“all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me”* (Psalm 42:6–7). The river Jordan is called the river of death. Jordan means descent and judgment. It starts up on Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon towers 9,000 feet above sea level. It takes a torturous path down to the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is 13,000 feet below sea level. And, the river Jordan just flows down to the Dead Sea never to emerge again. So, in Bible typology, Jordan has been the picture of death and despair. I’ve been up the headwaters of the Jordan where the waterfalls are. And, David feels like he’s just being washed over by circumstances. God’s waterspouts are coming over him. He is deluged with problems, and he doesn’t know where to turn. He has overwhelming circumstances.

I say sometimes people like this can become suicidal. A 16-year-old boy wrote this letter before he took his life: “Dear World, I don’t want to get my hair cut. I don’t want to tend kids. I don’t want to see Tina at school Monday. I don’t want to do my biology assignment, or English, or history, or anything. I don’t want to be sad or lonely or depressed anymore. I don’t want to eat, drink, talk, breathe, sleep, move, feel, or live anymore. Mom and Dad, it’s not your fault. I am not free. I feel ill. I am sad. I am lonely.”

That’s depression, and it’s sad: the serious problem of depression.

II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression

Now, here’s the second thing I want you to see. I want you to see the spiritual provision for depression. Thank God you don’t have to be depressed. God has made provision for you, for me, for our friends, those who are depressed.

A. Look Inward and Analyze Your Heart

Number one: You need to look within and analyze your heart. Look, if you will, in 42, verses 5 through 7: *“Why are thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me”* (Psalm 42:5–7).

But, now I want you to notice particularly now as David begins to talk to himself. You say, “Can you talk to yourself?” David did. David talked to his soul. The soul is the you that lives inside. Not the spirit: the spirit is your spiritual nature. Your soul is your

emotional nature. Your soul is mind, emotion, and will. And, David talks to his soul. Do you know there's someone in you that is constantly talking to you? It's that old man. It's that old nature. That's your soul, unredeemed or unsanctified, and your soul is constantly talking to you, saying, "You have reason to feel sorry for yourself. You will never make it. You haven't got what it takes. This is the end. Life is not worth living."

Now, David talked back to his soul. And, David said to his soul, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" Now, this is where you have to take control. You have to take your soul by the nape of the neck, hold your soul up in front of you, and talk to you. That's what David did. You have to look your soul straight in the eye and say, "Soul, why are you feeling this way?" You have to look within and analyze your heart. Why are you depressed?

Now, I'm not saying you don't have a reason to be depressed. Maybe you've lost a loved one by death. Maybe it's been a child. Maybe it's been a spouse. And, you have to say, "This is the reason for my depression: because of the loss of a loved one." If that's true, pour out your grief to God. Ask your friends to help share your grief with you and realize that life is not over for you. The best testimony for your love for that friend is to go on and live a life in their honor and for God's glory.

Maybe you have a broken heart. Maybe somebody that you loved jilted you. Maybe a husband walked off from you. Maybe there was a broken engagement. You ask yourself, "Why am I cast down?" Maybe your parents have made you feel unwelcomed in your own home. Refuse to brood and rehearse it over and over again. It does no good. But, ask yourself, analyze this. If you've had a heartbreak, see what you've learned from that heartbreak and go out and begin to make some new relationships.

Perhaps you have sinned, done some grievous thing, and you're being haunted by the ghost of guilt. What do you do? Confess it to God. If you need to confess it to someone else and ask forgiveness, do it. If you can make restitution, do it. Do what you do and then close the door behind it. Analyze. Look at your heart. Ask yourself, "Why am I cast down?"

B. Look Upward and Recognize Your Help

But, you need to do something else: not only look inward and analyze your heart, but look upward and recognize your help. Listen. Once you see what the problem is, now notice what David did. Look in Psalm 42, beginning in verse 7: *"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"* (Psalm 42:7–9).

What is David doing now? He's looking upward. Not only inward to see why I feel this way, but he's looking upward. He's looking to God, and he's saying, "God, you are my help. You are my hope. You will command your lovingkindness to me. What a friend I have in Jesus, all my sins and griefs to bear." You may say, "Pastor Rogers, you don't understand." That's not the point. God understands. God knows. How tender and how loving God is! And, He knows, and He cares. He's your help even when you don't understand.

Dr. Warren Weirsbe is a great Bible teacher. He has said that life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived. And, he has reminded us that we do not live by explanations; we live by promises. Some feel that somehow God has let them down and that God has failed them. God has not failed you. God has not forgotten you. David felt that, and he said, in verse 9, "Lord, why have you forgotten me?" But, God had not forgotten him.

You say, "Well, pastor, I don't understand." You don't have to understand. As a matter of fact, the fact that you don't understand may be part of the trial and part of the test. Robert Frost said this—listen—and this is so rich, so listen to it; don't miss it:

*But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn't understand it at the time.
It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning.*

—ROBERT FROST

You probably didn't catch that, so sharpen your mind and listen to it again:

*But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn't understand it at the time.
It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning.*

You see, we can trust God with almost anything if we understand why. But, God doesn't let us understand why all the time, that we might just trust Him with that which we don't understand.

Andrew Murray was a great, great Christian. Andrew Murray said this: "In times of trouble, God's trusting child may say: First: He brought me here. It is by His will that I am in this straight place. In that will I rest. Next: He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child. Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last: In His good time He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows.

So, when you're in this difficulty, say: I am here—(1) by God's appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, (4) for His time."

You see, somebody said, "God is too good to be unkind, too wise to make a

mistake, and when we cannot trace His hand, we can trust His heart.”

C. Look Onward and Realize Your Hope

Look inward and analyze your heart. “Why am I cast down?” Look upward and recognize your help. And, thirdly, look onward and realize your hope. Look again in verse 11: *“Why are thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him”* (Psalm 42:11). God wants me to tell somebody here today, no matter how bleak your circumstances, God is with you. Don’t lose hope. God has a future filled with hope for you. *“I shall yet praise Him.”* David took his soul, and he says to his soul, “Hope in God.”

Now, hope does not mean a vain wish. It means a definite assurance based in anticipation. There are only two places where hope is impossible. One is in Heaven, because you don’t need hope; you have fulfillment. The other is in Hell. If you die and go to Hell, you are beyond all hope. But, hope is always possible. Jeremiah 29, verse 11, is for you today, my precious friend. Listen to it: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”* (Jeremiah 29:11)—or, as some translations give it, “a future and a hope.”

Don’t you let Satan blow out the candle of hope. I’m telling you, you need to look inward and analyze your heart. You need to look upward and recognize your help. And, you look need to look onward and realize your hope. God wants me to tell you that He’s going to turn your Calvary into an Easter. God is going to turn every tear to a pearl. God is going to arch the rainbow of His grace over your sorrows. *“Hope thou in God.”* He is going to meet the deepest needs of your heart. And, God will never be satisfied until your greatest desire is for Him alone.

III. The Sure Promise in Depression

So, we’ve talked about the serious problem of depression. We’ve talked to you about God’s hope for you. Let me give you the sure promise, one more time, in depression. *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him”* (Psalm 42:5). You may have fallen, but I’m telling you, you can get up. And, if you’re depressed today, God loves you. Not a sparrow that has fallen to the ground goes without His notice. I know many of us give you a hug and slap on the back and tell you things are going to be better. But, friend, listen to me. There is no real hope in this world or the next world apart from Jesus.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
What the heart yearns for, by sin undermined;
I have the secret, I know where ’tis found:
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound....*

*Jesus is all this poor world needs today.
Blindly they strive, for sin and darkens their way.
O to pull back the grim curtains of night,
One glimpse of Jesus and all will be bright!*

—HARRY D. LOES

Conclusion

You know, last night as I thought about what I was going to speak on today, I said, “Lord, I don’t want to talk on depression. I want to talk about something that’s happy, or something that’s upbeat.” The Lord said, “Adrian, there’s someone who needs that message. There’s someone who is depressed.” Maybe you know who you are. And, God said, “Speak that message.” So, from God to you, let me tell you something. If you’re down, you can get up. God has a way for you. And, not by some cheap pop psychology, not by somebody slapping you on the back and saying, “Atta boy.” *“Hope thou in God.”* He will see you through. And, God’s people said, “Amen.”

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Date Preached: August 31, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 42:5–11

*“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”*

PSALMS 42:5

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Serious Problem of Depression
 - A. Spiritual Dryness
 - B. Continual Weeping
 - C. Shameful Defeat
 - D. Lingering Memories
 - E. Overwhelming Circumstances
- II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression
 - A. Look Inward and Analyze Your Heart
 - B. Look Upward and Recognize Your Help
 - C. Look Onward and Realize Your Hope
- III. The Sure Promise of Depression

Conclusion

Introduction

Look up here and find, if you would, in God's Word Psalm 42. And, we're going to look in that Psalm in a moment, especially at verse 5.

May I make a confession to you? I did not want to preach the message that I'm about to preach. I felt led to preach it. I prepared it. I made preparation. But then, last night I said to myself, "I don't want to preach that message" I went up to my study and prepared another message, and woke up this morning thinking I would preach the other message. And, the Lord said to me, "Why didn't you preach what you prepared? Why did you change your mind?" I said, "Well, I didn't really want to preach it." The Lord said, "Preach it. There's somebody who needs the message."

Now, what is the message? The message today deals with depression. Well, who wants to hear a message on depression? We'd much rather hear something about

happiness or joy or enthusiasm or victory. But, the message deals with depression. The title of the message is, “How to Get Up When You’re Down.” And, the Lord said to me, not out loud, but in my heart, “Adrian, preach what I laid on your heart. There is somebody or somebodies who need the message.” Perhaps you will be the one who will say, “Yes, pastor, that was the message for me.”

Psalm chapter 42 and verse 5: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*” (Psalm 42:5). David is talking to himself. And, David says, “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*” Now, it’s obvious as we read the rest of the chapter, which we will do later on, that David is in a state of despondency that we could call depression. Now, I’m not talking about just feeling sad. We all feel sad sometimes. I’m not talking about being disturbed. We all get disturbed sometimes. We all have broken hearts and disappointments and faded dreams. Those come to all of us. But, that’s not a depression.

One woman said to another woman while her husband was listening, “When I get down in the dumps, I get a new hat.” Her husband said, “I wondered where you were getting them.” Well, you can get down in the dumps and buy something pretty to make you happy. You can perk up and cheer up and get with friends and forget it. But, depression is different.

When I came into my office between services, I found a note on my desk from Joyce, who is in the choir: “Adrian, I shredded my front tire. It is ruined. Will tell you the circumstances when I see you. The car is at the northwest corner of the building. If someone can change my tire with one in the trunk, I’ll appreciate it. I’m leaving my keys.” And, then she’s got two little pictures here. One is a sad face with a mouth turned down and tears coming down. Then, the other one is a happy face with the corners turned up. And, she’s written on there, “Praise the Lord anyway. Joyce.”

Well, amen. Praise the Lord anyway. So, you can have a shredded tire and get over it. Somebody can lick the red off your candy and you can get over it. But, what about depression? That’s something different. “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*”

Three basic thoughts this morning.

I. The Serious Problem of Depression

First of all, I want you to see what I’m going to call the serious problem of depression—the serious problem of depression. We’re not talking about something that is a small problem. As a matter of fact, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that depression is over a billion dollar a year business—medical business. Millions of Americans are not able to go to work because of depression. Many of them are in hospitals. Some of them are debilitated. And, some are dead. And, it doesn’t do a lot of good to tell people like this, “Well, cheer up—cheer up.” There’s nothing they would like

to do better than to cheer up. And, they've tried everything that they know.

Now, what is depression? Let me give you a list that I've found. Depression is this: it's a passive or listless feeling. That is, you don't feel like doing anything—a continual feeling of sadness; not sadness that comes and goes, but that it lingers; an attitude that nothing feels good or is worth feeling good about. That's compounded by a state of constant hopelessness. You don't have any idea that it's going to get better. And then, a feeling that no one cares and no one truly understands just how you feel, or perhaps that "no one really truly accepts me."

Now, I found another list that you can use to check up and see if you are depressed. You want to find out whether or not you're depressed? Let's have at this list. Have you lost all initiative, gradually or cataclysmically—you just have kind of given up, thrown in the towel? Do you have repeated crying spells—you just feel overwhelmed with sorrow and find yourself crying? Do you wake up in the middle of the night for no apparent reason and have difficulty going back to sleep? Do you wake up in the morning with a feeling of dread—difficult to get out of bed; you hate to face the day? Do you feel sort of a numbness and aching pain all over—not really a pain with specificity that you can identify; you just feel bad mostly all over? Do you find yourself sometimes thinking about your own death, and maybe even afraid that you might have thoughts of suicide? Do you sometimes just, *huhhhhhh*, just sigh and have a heaviness in your chest? Do you have difficulty making decisions and moving through life? Do you distrust your own wisdom and keep second-guessing yourself? Do you find yourself irritable and cross with other people, no apparent reasons? Is it difficult for you to be enthusiastic about anything? That's not my list, but I think it's a pretty good list to help you understand whether or not you are a person who is cast down.

Now, this is a serious problem. It can be a killer disease. As a matter of fact, those of us who are in the ministry have often seen it: when we go out to the gravesite to put away one spouse, before long we put away the other, because depression, the loss of a loved one, has actually taken a life.

You say, "Well, pastor, these are people who don't know God, who don't trust God." Oh, no. Oh, no. Many of God's best saints have been depressed. Moses was so depressed that he asked God to take away his life. Elijah was so depressed that he asked God to take away his life. Jonah was so depressed that he asked God to take away his life. John the Baptist got down in the dungeon and got so depressed he even doubted that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God. And, the Apostle Paul, the great Apostle Paul, said he came to the place where he despaired even of life.

"Well, pastor, what about modern people? Do they ever get depressed?" Yes. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers that ever lived, a wise man who knew God. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a man of warmth and wisdom,

sometimes had doubts of depression that closed up shop for him. Other great men and women have talked about dark nights of the soul where they were perplexed and distressed. And, great leaders, world leaders, have been depressed. Winston Churchill, who was a hero of many, many people, who led Great Britain through the dark hours of the war, World War II, had sometimes fits and bouts of depression that closed him down. He called that depression a “black dog” that followed him and haunted his footsteps.

But, the one who wrote the passage that we’re looking at today was David. You think about a man who would have had reason for depression outwardly, what happened to David is this: that he’d had a son who raised up a rebellion against him, a son named Absalom. And, Absalom, that David loved, caused David to flee for his life. And then, Absalom was killed. And, David went, and he said, “O Absalom, Absalom! My son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, Absalom!” (2 Samuel 18:33).

David has no power now. He has no throne. He has no wealth. He has no resources, as such. Then, on top of that, he had a daughter that was raped. His wife was sexually assaulted. He had another son that died. The kingdom is in turmoil, and his enemies are laughing at him, and David is in despair. He’s in disconsolation. Things could not have looked bleaker for David. And, David is depressed, and he writes this Psalm. *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why are thou disquieted within me?”*

Now, what I’m trying to say is this: that this is a serious problem. Look in this Psalm, and look and see what David’s situation was.

A. Spiritual Dryness

First of all, there was a spiritual dryness. Look in verses 1 and 2: *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Psalm 42:1–2). It seems that God is far off. David is like a wild deer being hunted by a pack of dogs. He’s panting for breath, desiring for water. He could feel his soul shriveling up—spiritual dryness. People who get depressed feel that God is not real to them. Everybody else comes and rejoices in the music and in the preaching, but not them.

David felt that God had forgotten him. Look, if you will, in verse 9. He says here, *“I will say unto my God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?”* (Psalm 42:9). Now, God had not forgotten him. But, he’s thirsty for God. There’s a spiritual dryness.

B. Continual Weeping

And then, he’s in a continual crying jag. Look, if you will, in verse 3 of this Psalm: *“My tears have been my meat”—or “my food”—“day and night”* (Psalm 42:3). He finds himself just weeping. I mean, here’s a mighty warrior, a strong man of God. He’s soaking his pillow at nighttime with his tears. In the daytime, perhaps in a counseling

session with some of his warriors, he finds the tears coming unbidden. His chin begins to quiver, and he breaks out night and day with continual tears.

C. Shameful Defeat

David is feeling shame and defeat. Look, if you will, in verse 3: *“They continually say unto me, Where is thy God?”* (Psalm 42:3). Now, what does that mean? It means his enemies are taunting him. “David, you’ve been bragging about God: how much you love the Lord, and how great and how mighty is your God. Hey, buddy, where’s your God now? How come you’re not living in victory? Where’s all this victory you’ve been telling other people about?” And, David feels like somehow he has shamed God, and he’s ashamed of himself, and he knows that he is no model Christian, if you can call an Old Testament believer a Christian; he’s a not model saint, we can say. He feels that he’s disgraced God.

D. Lingering Memories

And, that’s compounded by the fact that he has lingering memories of what once was. Look in verse 4: *“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise”* (Psalm 42:4). He says, “I remember when it used to be different. I remember when I used to come to church and sing and worship God and praise Him with the multitude. But, not now. And, his haunting memory makes it even worse. And, the devil has told him it can never ever be like it once was. It’s gone. He has these lingering memories.

E. Overwhelming Circumstances

And then, he’s just overwhelmed with circumstances. Notice, if you will, in verse 6. Look at it here in verse 6: *“O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me”* (Psalm 42:6–7).

Now, you have to understand a little bit about Biblical geography here. He’s talking about Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon that rises up over 9,000 feet, snowcapped, in the land of Israel. Did you know people go skiing in the land of Israel on Mount Hermon? And, Mount Hermon is the source of the Jordan River. The Jordan River flows from the snow waters of Mount Hermon and the springs of Mount Hermon on down through the river Jordan, which is crooked and serpentine, on down, down, down, down, down, down, down, down, down to the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth, 1,300 feet below sea level. And, *Jordan*, the very word *Jordan* means, “descent.” And the name *dan* has the idea—*Jor-dan*—of judgment. It’s the river of death. It starts up here on Mount

Hermon, but it flows down to the Dead Sea never to rise again. And, David is using that as a symbol of despondency.

He says, “All thy waterspouts have gone over me.” He’s talking about waterfalls. Joyce and I have visited many times beautiful waterfalls up there, the headwaters of the river Jordan. But, he said, “It’s like the torrent is coming at me, just washing over me, and I don’t know where to turn. I don’t know what to do. I am overwhelmed—overwhelmed with problems.”

None of you ever been there? Maybe you will be, or maybe you know somebody who is there or will be, and God wants to give you a lesson today. I’m telling you, sometimes circumstances seem so great, so overwhelming, like everything is pouring in on our heads. That’s the way David was. That’s the way a young boy was, who committed suicide and left his note: “Dear World, I don’t want to get my hair cut. I don’t want to tend kids. I don’t want to see Tina at school Monday. I don’t want to do my biology assignment, or English, or history, or anything. I don’t want to be sad or lonely or depressed anymore. I don’t want to eat, drink, talk, breathe, sleep, move, feel, or live anymore. Mom and Dad, it’s not your fault. I am not free. I feel ill. I am sad, and I am lonely.”

That was a boy who needed the message that I am preaching this morning. And, there are many like that in today’s world. They are depressed. And, I’m telling you David was a man after God’s own heart. But, he came to this place. And, there’s no need for us just to paint the clouds with sunshine and say God is in His Heaven. All is right in His world. We need to understand that depression is a serious problem.

II. The Spiritual Provision for Depression

Second thing I want you to notice: the spiritual provision for depression—not only the serious problem of it, but the spiritual provision for it. There is an answer. I’m here to tell you that there is hope and there’s help for you.

A. Look Inward and Analyze Your Heart

Number one—write this down: You need to look inward and analyze your heart. Now, notice what David did, beginning in verse 5: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*” (Psalm 42:5). Now, David is talking to himself. Do you ever talk to yourself? I talk with me. I do. I talk to myself. I admit it. Some people say that’s a sign of insanity. Okay, I’m guilty. I talk to me. You talk to you, and sometimes I talk back to me. That’s what David did.

One man said about his wife, “You know, I’m concerned about my wife. She goes around the house, talking to herself all the time.” The man said, “Well, does she know she’s doing it?” Said, “No, she thinks I’m listening to her.”

Do you ever talk to yourself? There is a part of you, your carnal nature, that un-renewed mind, that power of negative thinking, that is constantly talking to you and saying, “You ought to feel sorry for yourself. You’re not going to make it. It’s over for you. There’s no hope for you. There’s no help for you.” And, that voice is constantly talking to you. It’s your soul. Now, what you need to do is to take your soul by the nape of the neck, hold it up in front of you, look it in the eye and say, “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*” Analyze your heart. Ask yourself why are you cast down.

Has it been the death of a child? The death of a spouse? You lost something dear and precious to you: is that the reason? Pour out your grief to God. Tell Him about it. Accept the love of friends. But, understand that it’s not big enough to destroy the rest of your life. Perhaps you’re cast down because someone has disappointed you. You were about to get married, and then it’s broken off. Perhaps your parents have not responded to you the way that they ought, and you feel unloved, perhaps unwanted. Perhaps a husband has walked off with somebody else, forsaking you and the children. That’s not the end of the world. As a matter of fact, if it’s a broken engagement, it may have been the best thing ever happened to you.

Two tears met. One tear said to the other tear. “Who are you?” That tear said, “I’m the tear of a girl whose fiancé jilted her for another girl. Who are you?” Said, “I am the tear of the girl who married that guy.”

Close the door. Learn what happened. Learn from the mistakes. But, you cannot live your life licking your wounds. Perhaps you’ve been to the doctor and the doctor has given you a very bad report. The doctor says what you have is incurable and it will get worse. What do you do? Do you get despondent? Do you get cast down? No! You say to yourself, “Look, though my outward man perish, my inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Find out what it is. Get it out there so you can look at it. Look it straight in the face. Analyze it. Look at it. “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*” Once you determine what it is, I mean really honestly face it, you start on the pathway.

B. Look Upward and Recognize Your Help

Look inward and analyze your heart. Then, look upward and recognize your help. That’s what David did. Let’s look in verse 8: “*Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life*” (Psalm 42:8). He looks inward and analyzes his heart. He looks upward and recognizes his help. God is not going to forsake you. He never has. He never will.

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!*

—JOSEPH M. SCRIVEN

You say, “Pastor Rogers, you don’t understand my problem.” That’s not the point.

He does. God understands. Let me give you an ancillary verse to put down in your margin here—Psalm 147, verses 3 and 4: *“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”* And then, notice the next verse: *“He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names”* (Psalm 147:3–4)—the number of the stars—the number of the stars—billions beyond billions beyond billions beyond billions out unto infinity. The only one who knows the number of how many stars there are is Almighty God.

Around New Years and Christmas somebody has come up with a good scheme. They’ll name a star for your loved one. Isn’t that sweet? All you have to do is send them some money. Friend, you don’t have to send them money. Just pick out one and name it yourself. But, the truth of the matter is it’s too late to do that. God has a name for the billions upon billions upon gazillion stars out there. He’s got a name for every one of them. *“He healeth the broken heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.”* The God who controls this mighty, mighty, mighty universe is the great God who cares about your broken heart. He cares. He attends the funeral of every sparrow. The hairs of your head are numbered (Matthew 10:29–30; Luke 12:6–7).

You say, “Well, I don’t understand why I’m having all this trouble.” You don’t have to understand. Warren Wiersbe said that life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived. Some lose their faith because in times of suffering and depression they don’t understand why.

David didn’t understand. Look in verse 9: *“I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”* (Psalm 42:7–9). “Why, God, why?” God didn’t answer the why. You know, we’ve got to know why. But, did you ever think that not knowing why might be God’s plan for you? Robert Frost said it perfectly. I’m going to give you a bit of wisdom here now, and you’re going to miss this, because it’s very subtle. If you don’t pay attention, you’ll miss it. Here’s what he said:

*But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn’t understand it at the time.
It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning.*
—ROBERT FROST

It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning. It was of the essence of the trial that you shouldn’t understand it at the time.

You see, when you don’t understand, and you say, “God, I trust You,” that’s faith, friend. You don’t have to know why when you know who, and you can put it in His hands. That’s the essence of the trial.

Sainted old Andrew Murray said this: “In times of trouble, God’s trusting child must

say: First: He brought me here; it is by His will that I am in this straight place: In that will I rest. Next: He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child. Then: He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last: In His good time He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows. Say: I am here—(1) by God’s appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) Under His training, (4) For His time.”

Look upward and recognize your help.

C. Look Onward and Realize Your Hope

Now, thirdly, after you’ve looked inward, and looked upward, look onward and realize your hope—your hope. No matter what’s happening to you, may I tell you it is not God’s final plan. Look in verse 11: *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God”* (Psalm 42:11).

He looked inward. He looked upward. Then, he looked onward. He looked inward to analyze his heart. He looked upward to recognize his help. And, he looked onward to realize his hope. He knew that God had not forsaken him. This is why David was a man of great faith. He had heartaches, yes. He had troubles. He had misunderstanding, yes. But, he said, “I know He’s going to see me through.” And, friend, God’s going to see you through. He’s going to turn your Calvary into an Easter. He’s going to turn your heartache to a hallelujah. He’s going to turn your tears to pearls. He’s going to arch the rainbow of hope over the storm of your life. My God will see you through.

Did you hear that? He will. God knows how to make a way for you. God says, in Jeremiah chapter 29, verse 11, *“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you [a future and a hope]”* (Jeremiah 29:11). Don’t you let Satan blow out the candle of hope in your life.

III. The Sure Promise of Depression

Thirdly and finally, I want you to notice the sure promise in depression. Look at it again—42, verse 11: *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him”* (Psalm 42:11). Beloved, if you’ve fallen emotionally and spiritually, you can get up. If you’re perplexed and in despair and don’t know the Lord, I feel sorry for you. I don’t know what people do who don’t know Jesus when they go through dark valleys. Aren’t you glad that, “Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” He goes through it with us (Psalm 23:4)? I wish everybody knew Jesus.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
What the heart yearns for, by sin undermined;*

*I have the secret, I know where 'tis found:
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound...
Blindly they strive, for sin and darkens their way.
O to pull back the grim curtains of night,
One glimpse of Jesus and all will be bright!*

—HARRY D. LOES

Conclusion

Would you bow your heads in prayer. If you're not saved, God wants you to be saved. God loves you exceedingly, abundantly more than you can ask or think. And, He wants to invite you into His family. With your eyes closed, I want you to picture Jesus with arms wide open, nail-pierced hands saying to you, "Come unto Me." *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). Friend, He died for you. He loves you. He wants to save you. He wants to restore your soul. He wants to heal your wounds. He wants to give you a home with Him in heaven. He wants you to have a vital relationship with Him right now.

Would you pray a prayer like this: "Dear God, I need You, and I want You. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You. I believe You shed Your blood on the cross for my sins. I believe God raised You from the dead. You died to save me and promised to save me if I would trust You, and that's what I'm doing. I receive You into my life, and I give my life to You. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me. And, begin now to make me the person You want me to be. And, help me never to be ashamed of You. Give me the courage to make it public. In Your name. Amen."

How to Come Back When You're Down

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 8, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 51

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

PSALMS 51:1–2

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Capability of Sin in the Saint
- II. The Consequences of Sin in the Saint
 - A. Sin Soils the Soul
 - B. Sin Saturates the Mind
 - C. Sin Stings the Conscience
 - D. Sin Saddens the Heart
 - E. Sin Sickens the Body
 - F. Sin Sours the Spirit
 - G. Sin Seals the Lips
- III. How Do You Come Back?
 - A. Confidence
 - B. Confession
 - C. Cleansing
 - 1. He Blots Sin Out: He Removes its Penalty
 - 2. He Washes Sin: He Removes its Pollution
 - 3. He Purges Us from Sin: He Removes its Power

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn to Psalm 51. And while you're turning, may I tell you that the devil does this: The devil will tempt us to sin, and he will say, "It's all right. You can get away with it." And he is the tempter. And then after you sin, he becomes the accuser. And he says, "You'll never get away with it." And what he wants to do is to get you off balance, get you out of the will of God, and bring discouragement to you, and make you feel that you can never, ever again come back.

I want to talk to you today about “How to Come Back When You Are Down.” Now Psalm 51 is the story of David’s repentance after he had sinned. You know that David committed the sin of adultery, and then, trying to cover it up, he committed the sin of, at the best, manslaughter, at the worst, cold-blooded murder. But this psalm is the psalm of a penitent. Because not only was David a great sinner; David was a great repenter. And that’s why I love Psalm 51.

I. The Capability of Sin in the Saint

Three basic things I want you to think about. The very first thing is this: the capability of sin in the saint. Now what I mean by that is that any of us have the capability to sin. When we get saved, that does not mean that we lose our capacity to sin. Many times sin in the saint is an unexpected opportunity and an undetected weakness. And when those two come together, we fall into sin. The Bible says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Now we’ve already told you that, when a child of God sins, if he’s truly a child of God, that sin cannot take away his salvation. But that does not mean that he can sin with impunity. I want to say, just as surely you put your hand on a hot stove, you get burned, if you’re bound to sin, you’re bound to suffer.

I remember reading years ago about an ex-prizefighter who got saved, and felt God had called him to preach. But nobody really wanted to give him a pulpit in a church. And so he set up a little pulpit of his own on a street corner in Chicago. And there, he would preach. And he had his congregation who would come, and he also had his detractors who would come. And they would throw eggs at him, and they would throw rotten vegetables and fruit at him. He had a little American flag over here, and a Christian flag over here. And a policeman would stand there to keep things from breaking out into a full-fledged riot, because this prizefighter was saved, but not entirely sanctified.

And so there was a certain man there who was a pseudo-intellectual and a cynic, who loved to come to see if he could confuse the ex-prizefighter and get him all befuddled. So they would have their little arguments that generated much more heat than light. But one day, this former prizefighter, this former pugilist, was ready for him. He said, “You say none of the Bible is true?” He said, “That’s right. I reject it all.” He said, “Well, if I can prove that just one verse in the Bible is true, will you apologize?” He said, “Yes, I will.” With that, the former prizefighter reached out and took this man by the nose, and twisted his nose so severely that the blood began to stream down both nostrils. And then he threw back his shoulders, opened his Bible to Proverbs, chapter 30, verse 33, and read: “Surely...the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood.” “Now,” he said, “you’ll have to admit that is true. I want you to apologize to me.” And he said, “That whole verse says, ‘The churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of

the nose bringeth forth blood.” Well, I want to tell you that, as surely as the churning of milk brings butter, as surely as the wringing of the nose brings forth blood, if you’re bound to sin, you’re bound to suffer.

Let no one think that the eternal security of the believer is in any way to be construed as a license to sin. God forbid. If you’re bound to sin, you’re bound to suffer. Whether you are saved, or whether you are lost.

II. The Consequences of Sin in the Saint

Now I want us to move not only from the capability of sin, to the consequences of sin. What happens when a Christian sins? I want to list some things here. Look in Psalm 51. David says, *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”*

A. Sin Soils the Soul

Now the first thing sin does in the life of a child of God, the first consequence is this: it soils his soil. It soils his soul. David says, “Wash me; cleanse me.” Now why did David do that? Well, he felt dirty. He’s not dirty physically. He’s a king. He bathed in his lavish marble tub. He slept on his silky sheets. He wore his royal robes. And yet, he feels grimy. He feels filthy. He feels dirty.

Did you know that’s one way that you can know that you are saved? Not whether or not you can sin; but does your sin make you feel dirty? You see, there’s a difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. The child of a devil sins, and it doesn’t bother him. He may take God’s name in vain, and you rebuke him. And he says, “What did I say?” or “What’s wrong with that?” He has no difficulty with sin.

There’s a difference between a child of God and a child of Satan. It’s just like a pig that wallows in the mud. Did you know that no pig has ever felt dirty? No pig has ever said, “Woe is me, I’m a dirty pig.” A sheep may fall in the mud, and wants to get out. But the pig just lies there, because that’s the pig’s nature. The pig doesn’t feel dirty. *The difference between a child of God and a child of the devil is this: The child of God may lapse into sin and he loathes it. The child of the devil leaps into sin and he loves it.*

Now David sinned, but David felt dirty. He felt grimy. He said, “O God, wash me, cleanse me.” Come up close, and I want to tell you something. If you can sin, and that sin does not make you feel grimy and dirty, I doubt that you’ve ever been saved. I doubt that you’ve ever been saved. I doubt that you have the Holy Spirit living in you.

B. Sin Saturates the Mind

Now that’s the first thing sin does. The second thing sin does: Not only does it soil the soul, but sin also saturates the mind. Notice in verse 3: *“For I acknowledge my*

transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.” Ever before me: night and day, day and night. The thing that David had done reverberates through his soul, and echoes through his conscience. He cannot get rid of it. It is there. It is an indelible mark. It is a wound to his psyche. It saturates his mind. Now if you can sin and easily forget that sin, I doubt that you’ve been saved. Because the Holy Spirit of God is there to remind you of that sin. David said, *“My sin is ever before me.”*

“Does that mean, Pastor Rogers, that if I sin, I’ll be thinking about it twenty-four hours a day?” Maybe not in your conscious mind, but it will be there in your subconscious. You may kick it out the front door. It’ll run around the house and come in the basement window. And it will show up as a migraine headache. It’ll show up as the inability to concentrate. It will show up as an irritable temper. It will show up as the inability to pray. It will show up in other ways. I’m not saying that, if you have a migraine, it’s because you’re a backslider. But I’m saying that some people have one because they are. Their sin is ever before them. It saturates the mind.

You see, there are two kinds of wounds that can come to the human psyche. One is guilt, and the other is sorrow. I’ve been dealing this past week with people who know sorrow. I was on the phone late last night with a precious member of our church whose husband just died and went to heaven. Her heart is wounded by sorrow, but not by guilt. You see, sorrow is a clean wound. And sorrow, because it is a clean wound, will heal. It’s a deep wound, a raw wound. It hurts. But it will heal, because it’s a clean wound. But guilt is a dirty wound. It festers, and festers, and festers, and it will never heal, until it is cleansed.

C. **Sin Stings the Conscience**

So what does this do? It soils the souls, it saturates the mind, and here is the third thing it does: It stings the conscience. Look in verse four: *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”* Now here, David is conscience-stricken. Here, David is not crying out against the Punisher. He’s crying out against the sin. He says, “O my God, I have sinned against You.” Some people say, “Well, David sinned against his kingdom.” He did. “Well,” you say, “David sinned against his family.” He did.” You say, “David sinned against his body.” He did. “David sinned against his wife.” He did. “David sinned against his children.” Of course, he did. But that’s not what bothered David primarily. David was a child of God, and David said, “O God, against thee and thee only have I sinned.” And David saw sin for what it really is: an affront to a Holy God. And it was the God who loved him, the God who had redeemed him.

Now listen very carefully. If all you’re afraid of is the punishment for your sin, I doubt that you’ve been saved. If you’re a child of God, when you sin, you don’t weep primarily because you’re going to get punished. You weep primarily because you have disgraced

your God. *“Against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight.”* “O God, I’m so ashamed. I sinned against You. Not only, God, did I break your law, I broke your heart.” You see, that’s the difference between a slave and a son. A slave, when he disobeys, fears the whip, his master’s lash. But a son, when he disobeys, if he’s a loving son, fears his father’s displeasure. And he is brokenhearted that he has broken the heart of God.

Does your sin bother you that way? When you sin, do you say, “O my God, my God, I sinned against you”? It stings the conscience. Trust me. “No torture the poet’s name, can match that fierce unutterable pain, he feels, who day and night devoid of rest, carries his own accuser within his breast.” It stings the conscience.

D. Sin Saddens the Heart

I’ll tell you something else it does. It saddens the heart. Look in verse 8: *“Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.”* Look in verse 12: *“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”* Now he’s not asking to have his salvation restored. You can be saved and be miserable. The most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man. Many unsaved people are having a ball. They’re living high, wide, and handsome. A lot of fun. Never tell anybody you can’t have any pleasure, if you’re not saved. Number one, it’s a lie. The Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin. Now the Bible says they’re for a season, but the Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin.

And David here is miserable, and he’s saved. He’s a child of God. And he is praying, “God, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.” *The most miserable man on earth is not a lost man. The most miserable man on earth is a saved man out of fellowship with God.* Isn’t that true? *When God saves you, God doesn’t fix you where you can’t sin anymore. He just fixes you where you can’t sin and enjoy it anymore.* That’s what God does, when God saves you. So here David is praying, “Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”

Do you want to see whether you are backslidden or not, or whether you are saved or lost? Let’s take the joy test. Do you have joy in your heart, *“joy unspeakable and full of glory?”* (1 Peter 1:8). You say, “Well now, Pastor, no I don’t have joy. Nobody is supposed to be joyful all the time. I’ve had some tough times.” Well, joy does best in tough times. Friend, the Bible says, *“Rejoice in the Lord”*—what’s that next word?—*“always.”* (Philippians 4:4). Always. *“Rejoice in the Lord always.”* Now he doesn’t say be happy always. You wouldn’t want to be happy all the time. Happiness depends upon what happens. If your *hap* is good, you’re happy. If your *hap* is bad, you’re unhappy. And *hap* depends on happenstance. But joy depends upon Jesus. *Happiness is like a thermometer: it registers conditions. Joy is like a thermostat: it controls conditions.* It’s the joy of the Lord that is your strength. Joy never changes. You’re to have joy all

the time.

There's only one thing that can take away joy. Not circumstances. It is sin. And only one kind of sin: yours. Not what somebody else does. Nobody else's sin can take away your joy. A disobedient child cannot take away your joy. An unfaithful husband cannot take your joy. An ungodly government cannot take your joy. None of these things can take your joy. They didn't give it to you. Jesus gives it. It is joy in the Lord. It is not joy that removes the pain; it is joy that helps you endure the pain. That's the joy of the Lord. *"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."* If the joy is not there, friend, it is because you are not abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has well said, "Joy is the flag that is flown from the castle of the heart, when the King is in residence."

E. **Sin Sickens the Body**

Now not only that, not only does it sadden the heart, but it also sickens the body. Look in verse 8: *"Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."*

Well, did God put a hammerlock on David and break his bones? Not literally. This is poetry. And David is using poetry. David is a poet. We do the same thing today. We use the same analogy today. We say, "I was just crushed." Does that mean a steamroller went over us? No, he's talking in poetic terms. What he's saying is, "God, you have me under extreme pressure." *"The bones which thou hast broken."* It's almost as if God has David in his hand, and God is just squeezing the life out of David. Sometimes, people think, "Well, if we sin, God will just cast us off." Oh no, he squeezes all the tighter, that's the thing. He's saying, *"Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice."* There's incredible pressure.

Now if you keep that pressure on for a long time, it's going to make you sick. It's going to make you sick. Did you know that the pressure of sin can sicken your body, if you're a child of God? Did you know that many children of God are sicker than they ought to be?

Now sickness is a very complicated thing, and there are many reasons for sickness. But one of the reasons for sickness is sin in the life of a child of God. One of the proof texts for that is 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and verse 30. Paul talked about some who were irreverent at the Lord's Table. And he said, *"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and some are dead. Because you have sinned irreverently at the Lord's Table. You have taken the Holy Supper in a cavalier manner."* And he says, *"For this cause many are sick and weakly among you."*

Sin causes sickness. And I could give many, many illustrations of that. And sometimes you can get sick unto death. You say, "Pastor Rogers, if I get saved, and I live in sin, will that mean I won't go to heaven?" Friend, it might mean you'll go to

heaven a lot quicker than you planned to. I mean, you just might get there even sooner than you expected to get there. *“For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”* And the word *sleep* is a term that is used for the death of a child of God, not for the death of an unsaved person. And so if you’ve lost your joy, no wonder you might get sick.

Because *“a merry heart doeth good like a medicine”* (Proverbs 17:22). Did you know that, when you are right with God, you stand straighter? Did you know that, when you are right with God, you smile more? Did you know that, when you are right with God, you sleep better? Did you know that, when you are right with God, you digest your food better? I’m just telling you, friend, that a merry heart is one of the best medicines you can take. But you can’t have that joy of the Lord, if you are a backslider, walking away from God. Here is David, a child of God. And he is perfectly miserable.

F. **Sin Sours the Spirit**

I’ll tell you something else it does. It sours the spirit. Look in verse 10: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”* David had a wrong spirit. Have you ever seen a backslidden person with a sour spirit? Do you know I’d much rather be around a good, old-fashioned, unsaved pagan than a backslidden Christian? The most censorious, cantankerous, vituperative, can’t-get-along-with type of individuals I’ve ever known are backsliders, because they’re miserable on the inside. And because they’re condemned, they’re trying to push their misery off on everybody else. You watch a person with a sour spirit, a person with a wrong spirit. They are the most critical persons in our church. You know, they think that God gave them the gift of criticism. Do you know what their problem is? They are backslidden. No dish on the table looks good to a person with a sour stomach. And they just find fault everywhere, with everything.

The case in point: David had committed adultery, and then, trying to cover it up, he committed the sin of manslaughter. Nathan the prophet came to speak to him. He didn’t come to talk about church finance, either. He came to talk about David’s sin. He told David a story about a man who had a little pet lamb that was like his own daughter. Ate from his table. A poor man. Then, he lived next door to a very rich man. This rich man had thousands of flocks and herds. And then, the rich man had a stranger to stop by. And the rich man took the poor man’s lamb, killed it, cooked it, and fed it to the stranger.

He said, “Now David, you’re the king. Tell us what ought to be done to the man who has done this thing.” David was livid with rage. He jumped up from his throne. I can see him as he clinches his fist, grits his teeth, and says, “The man that has done that will pay fourfold!” And Nathan the prophet said, “You are the man.” “You’re the man. You are the man, David. You just sentenced yourself in your own court.” It was all an analogy. The little lamb was Bathsheba, the one that David had stolen.

And what had happened was this: David was quick to judge a man that had stolen a lamb, when he had stolen another man's life. David was quick to judge the man who had killed an animal, but he had killed a human being. And yet, he was quick to judge somebody else. You'll always find those who are backslidden are very careful to judge people for less sin than they have in their own lives. They're the ones trying to pick specks out of other people's eyes, when they have logs in their own eyes. They have a sour spirit. Are you one of those sour-spirited people? Oh, you'll feel so much better, when you get back right with God.

G. **Sin Seals the Lips**

And then, the last thing that sin does in the life of a child of God. Not only does it sour his spirit, but it seals his lips. Look, if you will, here in verse 12: *“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”*

Now sin in the life of a Christian shuts his mouth, it seals his lips. David says, “When I get right, then I'll be a soul winner. When I get right, then I'll be a singer. When I get right, then I will praise.” Do you know how you can tell whether or not a person is backslidden or not? When a person is backslidden, as a general rule, singing just stops. Oh, he'll sing, but it doesn't come from his heart. Praise withers. Soul-winning stops altogether. Because sin shuts his mouth. The devil says, “Who are you to be singing, ‘What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart.’? Who are you to be singing, ‘What a mighty God we serve’? Who are you to be testifying, and telling somebody else they need to get saved, when you are such a miserable example, and you have no joy, and you have no peace, and you don't even have any real assurance in your own heart, and in your own life.” The devil intimidates so many people, because there is sin in their heart, and in their life.

Now all of these things put together are things that happen in this life. And then, when you come to the judgment seat of Christ, oh, what a loss of reward there will be!

III. **How Do You Come Back?**

But very quickly now, how do you come back? How do you come back, when you get into this situation? How do you come back? Three very simple and wonderful things. Oh, I love this psalm! It is so wonderful!

A. **Confidence**

The very first—and they all start with the letter *c*. And I want you to jot them down. The very first thing is confidence. Confidence. You must have confidence that God still loves

you. Notice how David prays, beginning in verse one: *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”* David had confidence in his God. David knew—are you listening? David knew that, for a multitude of sins there were a multitude of tender mercies. Do you see? *“According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.”* David knew that he was a sinner. But David knew that God was full of loving-kindness.

The devil will tell you, if you’ve sinned grievously, that God is finished with you. The devil will tell you there is no hope for you. The devil will tell you that God has cast you off. But that is a lie. There’s nothing you can do that will make God stop loving you. Oh friend, remember that. Remember that. Don’t you listen to the dirty devil. David had confidence in God. And God loves you today. I don’t care what you’ve done, how many times you’ve failed, probably nobody here has committed sin in the magnitude of David. And yet, David said, *“O God...according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.”* For great sin there is great grace. Say amen! For great sin there is great grace. For great sin there is great grace. That is confidence.

B. Confession

Now the next c is confession. Notice what he says, in verse 3: *“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”* This is a confession. The Bible says, in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us”—*hallelujah—*“from all unrighteousness.”* Now it’s not just an admission of sin. It’s a confession. He is saying, “I’ve sinned against You.”

There is one thing that God will not accept for sin, friend, and that is an excuse and an alibi. Now David could have said, “Well, it wasn’t my fault. My wife wasn’t showing me the love I deserve.” Or, he says, “It wasn’t my fault. Bathsheba was out there bathing where she shouldn’t have been bathing.” Or, “I just I had a weak moment. But God, you know all of us are human. I had a glandular malfunction.” I mean, he could have given all of these alibis for sin.

There’s one thing that God will not accept for sin, and that is an alibi. But a confession means to agree with God. And he says, “O God, I am guilty. ‘Not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.’” Now it’s an honest confession. God just wants you to confess it. When we try to cover it, God uncovers it. But when we uncover it, God covers it.

C. Cleansing

Now he just cleanses and forgives. So that’s the third one. First of all, confidence; secondly, confession; thirdly, cleansing. Notice he says, in verse 2, *“Wash me*

thoroughly.” Notice he says, in verse 7, *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”*

1. He Blots Sin Out: He Removes its Penalty

“Wash me, purge me, blot out my transgressions,” he says. When he blots them out, he just erases the record. It’s gone. It’s blotted out. It’s not there anymore. He just blots it out. It is gone. Buried in the grave of God’s forgetfulness, never to be brought up again. If anybody ever brings it up again, it’s the devil bringing it up, or your conscience bringing it up. But God doesn’t bring it up. He blots it out.

2. He Washes Sin: He Removes its Pollution

Not only does he blot it out, but he says also, *“Wash me.”* Now not only does he remove the penalty, friend, he removes the pollution. I mean, he gets the filth off. You’re clean, whiter than snow. You’re not just patched up. God has forgotten that sin. It is gone. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us”*—cleanse us—*“from all unrighteousness.”* “The blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son, cleanseth us”—from what? How much sin? All, all. Don’t you let the devil say, “Yeah, but yours is a ‘biggie.’ Oh yeah, but not yours.” No, he says, “all sin.” All sin.

3. He Purges Us from Sin: He Removes its Power

So he says, *“Wash me.”* That deals with the pollution of sin. And then, he says, *“Purge me.”* That deals with the power of sin. Not only does he take away the penalty, not only does he take away the pollution, but, friend, he literally purges you on the inside. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! This is God’s triple detergent. And you don’t need to go around with a load of guilt anymore. You don’t need to go around carrying all of that condemnation that Satan has put on you anymore. You can be as clean—*“Wash me and I shall be”*—what?—*“whiter than snow”!* Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that glorious? Hallelujah! What a great God! What a mighty God we serve! There’s the capability of sin, there’s the consequences of sin, but, thank God, there is the cleansing of sin.

Conclusion

Let’s bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, eyes are closed. Father, I pray today that many in this building who have been being intimidated by Satan would come today, just come to You, and, Lord, come with an honest confidence, confession and know that cleansing. And I pray, dear God, that those who are not yet saved will come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In His wonderful name. Amen.

The Power of Perpetual Praise

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 6, 1986

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 57:7

“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.”

PSALMS 57:7

Outline

Introduction

- I. We Praise in Order to Reverence the Savior
- II. We Praise in Order to Resist Satan
- III. We Praise in Order to Release the Spirit
- IV. We Praise in Order to Refresh the Saints
- V. We Praise in Order to Reach the Sinner

Conclusion

Introduction

Now, I want you to take God’s Word tonight and turn to Psalm 57 with me, please. Here is a very wonderful verse that has been a blessing to my heart through the years. Psalm 57:7: *“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.”* That is a tremendous verse. Now, when David says that his heart is *“fixed,”* it doesn’t mean that he’s had a broken heart and it’s been repaired; but, what he does mean is this: that my heart is steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. I have in my heart a resolute purpose. I will sing. I will praise. I have determined that I will live a life of perpetual praise. I want you to think tonight on this subject: *“The Power Of Perpetual Praise.”* We need to learn how to make praise a permanent pattern in our lives and to perpetually praise the Lord.

The late great Robert G. Lee, who was pastor of this church, would many times autograph a Bible or sign a letter, and at the close of that letter he would write this scripture, and he’s done that for many of you who are here tonight. Psalm 34:1—is that right? Any of you have a Bible inscribed or a note from Dr. Lee that had Psalm 34:1 on it? Just lift your hand. Anybody? All right now, somebody... Yeah, there’s somebody way up there. Boy, I was afraid I told a fib or something. Now, I know that is true. So many times, you see, Dr. Lee would sign Psalm 34:1 under his name. Do you know what that Psalm says? *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”* Not just the good times, but also the bad times and the in-between times.

“I will bless the LORD.”

What is praise? Praise is all there is of me responding to all I know of Him—that’s what praise is. Praise is all there is of me responding to all I know of Him. We’re to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). What is worshiping the Lord in spirit and in truth? Well, worshiping the Lord in spirit is letting the Holy Spirit in you engender that praise as it goes to God. But, what is worshiping the Lord in truth? Well, there’s the truth of God’s Word, and it has to be based upon that eternal, rock-ribbed, established truth of God’s Word. But, I think also that worshiping God in truth is that we no longer try to hide how we feel about God. We’re truthful about how we feel about God.

You know, so many of us are inhibited when we ought to be inhabited by the power of God, and we don’t worship God in truth. We try to maintain dignity. We try to save face, but we just need to worship God in spirit and in truth, and we need to worship Him perpetually. We need to worship God—listen—and we need to praise God from principle and not from impulse.

Now, David said, *“My heart is fixed,”* that “it doesn’t matter what happens; I am going to worship the Lord. I am going to praise the Lord at all times. My heart is fixed worshiping, singing, and praising the Lord. Oh, God, my heart is fixed. I will sing and give praise. It doesn’t matter what happens.” The Bible says we’re to be giving thanks always for all things, because He is the sovereign God.

Now, did you know that there is more emphasis upon praise than there is upon prayer? Now, as important as prayer is—and, God knows that I would not diminish the importance of prayer—there is a greater emphasis in the Bible upon praise than upon prayer. And, don’t get the idea that praise and prayer are the same. Prayer, in the strictest sense of the word, is asking God for something. It is coming to God and receiving something from God. That’s what prayer is. Prayer is a petition that comes into God’s presence to carry something away, but praise goes into God’s presence to remain there forever. Prayer asks something from God. Praise doesn’t ask anything from God; it just simply ascends like sweet smelling incense into the presence of Almighty God.

Now, I want to give you some reasons now for perpetual praise. No matter what happens, that you will say, *“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise”*—not “I might,” but “I will.” *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

I. We Praise in Order to Reverence the Savior

Reason number one for why we need to perpetually praise the Lord is this: in order to give Him reverence—in order to reverence the Savior. Did you know that the entire universe of things—living and nonliving, even the rocks—are to be one great paean of

praise to our Lord? Just jot this scripture down—Psalm 145:10: *“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.”* That is, the rocks, the trees, the river, the ocean, the sun, the moon, and the stars: all of these give praise to God. The flowers say, “Praise the Lord.” The beast of the field says, “Praise the Lord.” The rivers say, “Praise the Lord.” The stars, like chandeliers in the sky, say, “Praise the Lord.” *“All thy works shall praise thee...”*—that is, dear friend, that everything that God has created has been created to give Him praise—*“...and thy saints shall bless thee.”*

Praise is the biggest occupation of angels. Turn with me to Revelation 4 for just a moment, and look, if you will, in verse 8: *“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy...”*—by the way, why do they say, “Holy, holy, holy?” Why don’t they just say, “Holy, holy,” or why don’t they just say, “Holy?” Holy is the Father, holy is the Son, holy is the Spirit, and we worship a triune God—*“Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”* (Revelation 4:8). Now, don’t let the word *beast* there somehow get you to thinking the wrong idea. Actually, that’s a poor translation. Actually, it should be “the four *creatures*.” Here he’s talking about angelic creatures. The word *beast* here simply means, “a living being.” These are angels, and they praise the Lord continually. *“They rest not day and night,”* and they praise the great triune God.

Look, if you will, in Revelation 5:11: *“And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”* (Revelation 5:11–12). Can you imagine the multiplied millions of beings in the glory—angelic beings—that are praising the Lord? Thousands and thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands praising the Lord.

I hear people saying, “Well, I just don’t like a big church.” I wonder what you’re going to do up there, folks. Listen. Let me tell you something. Bigness doesn’t bother me. It’s smallness that bothers me. When we have a world that’s lost and damned and going to Hell, I’m looking forward one time to being in a service where we have a voice of a hundred million singing the Hallelujah Chorus up in glory. It will be wonderful just praising the Lord and giving praise to God. I’m telling you that praise is the highest occupation of angels, and praise reverences the Savior. If for no other reason than to simply give our dear precious Savior glory, then we ought to want to praise. We ought to develop the attitude of gratitude and perpetual praise.

II. We Praise in Order to Resist Satan

Number one: to reverence the Savior. Number two: You had better learn the pattern of perpetual praise in order to resist Satan. Did you know that in a very real sense praise lifts up a bulwark against the devil? For some reason, Satan fears our praise even more than he fears our prayer. Turn to 2 Chronicles 20 for just a moment. Turn to 2 Chronicles—that's over in the Old Testament. Let me give you the setting for what has happened here. Now, Jehoshaphat is a good king. He is the king of Judah, and there are some enemies that have come against Judah. The Moabites have come against Judah. The Amorites have come against Judah. The people of Mount Seir have come against Judah, and they've come against King Jehoshaphat. And, King Jehoshaphat goes to the Lord and begins to talk to the Lord about it. And, in 2 Chronicles 20, beginning in verse 15, here's what God said to him: *"And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high."* Now, there's a battle out there. There is a demonically inspired army: great numbers mobilized, demonized, and organized. Now, notice verse 20: *"And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness..."*—Brother Jim, that's one of the greatest verses in all of the Bible on church music right there: "And he appointed singers unto the Lord," not for people, not for entertainment, but to sing unto the Lord. And, what shall they sing about? They—"should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. *And when they began to sing and praise,*"—not after they began to sing and praise, and not before they began to sing and praise, but when they began to sing and praise—"the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten" (2 Chronicles 20:15–22).

Now, the people of Judah might have said, “When God gives us the victory, then we’ll praise.” But, God says, “You’ll not see victory until you praise. You’ll go forth with singing; you’ll go forth with praise.” Can you imagine a modern general or the President of the United States commanding the troops to go out against the enemy, saying, “You’re not to fire a single shot; you’re not to drop a bomb; you’re not to send a tank; you’re not to launch an airplane; you’re not going to do anything until we get the Marine Band to go out first of all playing ‘Onward Christian Soldiers,’ and we’ll get someone else to sing the military chorus—to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.’” Listen, dear friend. God gave victory in this day when His people began to praise.

Now, let me teach you a secret. God is especially present when we praise. Do you want to bring God into a situation? I mean, just to invoke the blessings—the presence—of God? Let me give you another Psalm—Psalm 22:3: *“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”* God lives in praise. What is God’s address? Praise. Praise is God’s address. *“Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”* God dwells in the midst of His praise. Now, let me tell you what profanity is. Profanity is praise in reverse. Rather than blessing the name of God, you curse the name of God; you condemn the name of God; you vilify the name of God. If you ever want to give the devil a campground, then you take God’s name in vain, and the devil moves in on that; the devil lives in that profanity. But, on the other hand, when you begin to praise, when you begin to glorify God, there’s just something about praise that the devil is allergic to.

Dr. Gray Allison, the president of Mid-America Seminary, doesn’t like to smell eucalyptus. As a matter of fact, I had an ornament in my office, and somebody had put some eucalyptus leaves in there, and he walked in the door, and he said, “I’ve got to get out of here.” I said, “What do you mean? What’s wrong?” He said, “Can’t you smell that? That’s eucalyptus.” I’ve been around him other times when there’s eucalyptus. He just can’t stand that. He’s just got to get out.

Friends, that’s the way the devil is about praise. He just can’t stand it. I mean, when people are praising the Lord—I mean, glorifying God—the devil saturates that place with his absence; but, when people are cursing and vilifying the name of God, that becomes the devil’s dirty campground. Listen to me. God inhabits the praises of His people, and when there is massive, triumphant, organized, Spirit-filled praise, the devil is paralyzed. The devil is bound. The devil is banished when there is the power of praise. Do you want to release God’s power? Then, learn, my friend, the pattern of perpetual praise, and say, “My heart is fixed O God. I will sing; I will praise the Lord.”

III. We Praise in Order to Release the Spirit

But, not only do you reverence the Savior, and not only do you resist Satan, but dear friend, you also release the Spirit. God’s Holy Spirit acts in response to your praise.

Learn how to praise by studying the Psalms. It's a good habit, and many people do this. Every day read one chapter in Proverbs and at least one Psalm. The Proverbs will give you wisdom for the day, and the Psalms will teach you how to pray and how to praise. Psalm 61:8: *"So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows."* You say, "How am I ever going to get it all done? How am I going to have the power of God in my life?" Listen. If you are too busy to praise, then you are too busy. If you're too busy to praise, then you're like a man chopping wood who is too busy to sharpen his axe.

Listen: *"So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows."* Praise and performance are inseparably linked. When I find myself getting tired—and, sometimes I get tired; I really do. I don't get—as the cliché says—I don't get tired *of* the work, but sometimes I get tired *in* the work. But, if I want something that will just vivify me—I mean, it's an amazing thing—If I want something that will give me strength and stir me, then I begin to praise the Lord—just to praise the Lord. And, I say to the Lord, "Lord, You say that the joy of the Lord is my strength, and Lord, I have joy in You. I refresh my soul in You. I bathe my soul in You." Sometimes I'll just lift my hands and look into the face of the Lord and tell Him how I love Him and just offer Him praise, and His Holy Spirit just comes into me in a quickening, vivifying way, and I feel strength and energy coming into my body and being released through my heart, mind, and lips.

Now, this is what the Psalmist is saying: *"So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows."* Praise and performance are inseparably linked together, because—I'll tell you why—God moves in when we believe God, and praise is faith turned inside out. That's all it is. Praise is the outward expression of that inward confidence that we have a great God.

IV. We Praise in Order to Refresh the Saints

So, what does praise do? Why, it reverences the Savior. What does praise do? It resists Satan. What does praise do? It releases the Spirit. And, therefore, what does praise do? It refreshes the saints. You see, praise is the highest function the human spirit can attain.

Now, I read a lot of books. I'm always reading something, and I have noticed in these last 10 or 15 years there have been a great number of books written on mental health for Christians. It seems like Christians now are nervous, high-strung, and neurotic. They're having as many mental disorders as the people of this world. I, for one, am pretty well convinced that we wouldn't need nearly so many psychologists, psychiatrists, and tranquilizers if we had more praise. I really believe that. I believe that most of our mental and nervous disorders are over-occupation with personal ego and self-centeredness; and, when personality becomes self-centered, anything that is ego-

centered is eccentric and is going to disintegrate, if God is not the center of your life.

Last Wednesday night, our evangelist said that, “Jesus is the glue of the galaxies. By Jesus, all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). And, he said, “All things—not only physical, but emotional and institutional—are held together by Jesus. And, if you take Jesus out of the center, then it begins to come apart.” The reason that many have personalities that are fragmented and coming apart is they are ego-centered, and therefore, there is a built-in self-destructiveness. A person who is very self-centered—you mark it down—anybody who is self-centered is going to become defensive. Ultimately, he is going to become hostile, and he will become aggressive, if he is continually and perpetually self-centered. But, when he becomes God-centered—and that’s what praise does—when he becomes God-centered, suddenly, he becomes a whole person again—or gradually, I should say, because it doesn’t happen just overnight. This is not just pop psychology. This is what Jesus said: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it”* (Mark 8:35).

Now, what Jesus said, if I can put it in modern language, is this: A self-centered life will be destroyed. A God-centered life will be saved. You see, you cannot continually, perpetually praise God without relinquishing that occupation with self. When praise becomes a way of life, the infinitely lovely God becomes the center of your attention, rather than your bankrupt self. And, when you worship the King in the beauty of holiness (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 29:2; Psalm 96:9), then there’s something that happens on the inside of you that renews you, reinvigorates you, and refreshes you.

You cannot praise and sulk. You can’t do it. Most of us need to pull some of the groans out of our praise and shove in some hallelujahs. Praise and irritation cannot exist at the same time. Isaiah 61:3—the Bible says God has given us the *“garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* Anybody here with the spirit of heaviness? God wants to wrap you up. He wants to redress you. God wants to give you a *“garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”*

And so, what will praise do? Praise will refresh the saints. Now, that’s a very interesting thing. There is so much in the Bible where God tells us to worship Him. There is so much in the Bible where it says to give glory to God. And, God Himself says that. Well, I want to ask you a question. Is God some kind of an egomaniac? I mean, is God so unsure of Himself that He has to have people continually telling Him how great He is? No, friend. God is not some kind of celestial egotist who needs to have His ego boosted. God is not so unsure of Himself that He’s always saying, “Now, folks, tell me how great I am.” Let me tell you something about praise. Praise does not add anything to God’s changeless glory. And, if you fail to praise, then God is not diminished at all. God wants you to worship, because He loves you so. God wants you to worship, not for

what your worship does for God, but for what it does for you.

You need to worship. Why? A man becomes like what he worships. And so, dear friends, in a true and in a good sense, when we worship God, we become like God. Second Corinthians 3:18—listen to it: *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18). Are you listening to me? You will be better if you want to worship better. When you praise, it changes you. When we worship Him as we ought, we become as we ought.

With some people, all worship is as dull as getting on an elevator, letting the door close behind you, letting the door open again, and getting off on the same floor. Have you ever done that? Now, friend, that is what some people do when they come to church. They are not changed at all. When you really worship, you move up one step higher, one floor higher. You have an encounter with God, and when all that you know of yourself responds to all you know of God, then you begin to worship Him and praise Him in Spirit and in truth.

The Bible says that you *“are changed into the same image from glory to glory.”* And, what happens when you praise the Lord and say, “My heart is fixed. I will sing. I will praise. His praise shall be continually, perpetually in my mouth”? You become more and more like the one that you worship. There is that adoring contemplation of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

V. We Praise in Order to Reach the Sinner

And so, what does praise do? Praise refreshes the saints. I’ll tell you what else it will do. Turn with me to Psalm 40 for just a moment. Praise will reach the sinner. Do you want to get folks saved around here at Bellevue Baptist Church? Look, if you will, in Psalm 40:1: *“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit,”*—have you been in a pit lately?—*“out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God:”*—now, notice the rest of this—*“many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD”* (Psalm 40:1–3). God brings us up out of the pit. God puts us upon the rock. God puts a song in our hearts. It’s not just the kind of a song that you can hear; it’s the kind of a song that you can sing; but, it’s also the kind of a song that you can see. *“Many shall see it, and fear”*: that means that they give reverence and trust unto the Lord. I am to be a two-legged song in a major key. People are to look at my life and your life, and they are to say, “What makes that guy tick? What gives him that joy? What gives him that perpetual victory? What enables him to live day after day after day after day after day in victory? What does that?” And, he’s going to have a reverence and a fear. And, he’s going to want to trust in the God that you trust

in.

Ladies and gentlemen and people of Bellevue, there can be no greater means of outreach than for the unsaved to see the beauty of Jesus proclaimed in our lives through perpetual praise. *“Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”* You let an unsaved person get in a service where God’s people are happy and praising the Lord and giving victory and praise to Jesus, and he’s going to look around and say, “These folks believe that stuff.” And, before long, he’s going to believe it too. Isn’t that right?

Evangelism is as much caught as it is taught. I want to tell you ushers that evangelism is in your handshake—in the way that you shake hands. I want to tell you chorus that it would be a good time to look pretty right now. Evangelism is the way you sit in the choir loft and say *amen* when the preacher preaches and say *amen* even when you don’t understand it. Just look pretty. That’s evangelism. Let me tell you something, friends. Evangelism is the way we sing:

*What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus has come into my heart.*

—RUFUS H. MCDANIEL

Evangelism is the way that we smile at the guest and make them feel welcome. Dear friend, when there is that praise, that joy, and that victory, there’s a holy contagiousness, where people come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

How we need to learn the power of perpetual praise, because not only, dear friend, will it refresh the saints, but it will also reach the sinner. “He hath put a new song in my mouth. He has set my feet upon the rock, and many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.” That’s the kind of evangelism that I believe in. I’m not diminishing at all; I’m telling them word for word about Jesus. We have to give them the gospel. But, dear friend, they need to see the victory in our lives. What a mighty force for evangelism and reclaiming the backslidden!

*I’ll sing it and tell it wherever I go,
I want all to hear it, I want all to know
The joy of salvation that makes the heart glow,
For I have been born again.*

—R. H. MCDANIEL

Conclusion

Let me just close this message by saying this, folks. Ultimately—ultimately—you are going to end up in one of two places: either in Heaven or in Hell. Do you know what they do in Heaven for all eternity? They praise. Do you know what they do in Hell for all eternity? They blaspheme. Hell is a place of gnashing of teeth and blasphemy against

God. Heaven is a place of perpetual praise. And, you are going to be forever in one of the two, and it is all determined by what you do with Jesus. You say, “Well, preacher, I’m not all that bad; and, I know that some of these sinners need to be saved, but I’m not all that bad.”

A preacher talked to his doctor one time and said, “Doctor, in medical experience, and from your knowledge, what is the most potent poison that you know anything about?” And, the doctor thought for a while, and he said, “I suppose it would be potassium cyanide.” And, the preacher said, “Well, doctor, how potent is that poison?” And, the doctor said, “I’ll tell you how potent it is. If you were to take the stopper off the bottle of potassium cyanide and touch it to the base of your tongue where the blood vessels are right on the surface,” he said, “you would be dead before you could put the stopper back on the bottle.” And, the preacher said, “Well, what would happen if you were to drink the whole bottle?” And, the doctor said, “It wouldn’t make any difference. You couldn’t be any more dead.”

Hey, folks, it’s not the amount of sin; it’s the fact of sin that condemns you. Did you know that? It’s the fact of sin. The Bible says that, “*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). And, there’s not one perfect person here tonight, and therefore there’s not one person who needs not be saved if he hasn’t been saved. But, thank God, whether it’s a drop or the whole bottle, there’s none that cannot be saved, for Jesus died for you. I want to tell you—now, listen to me—*there’s no one so good that needs not be saved, and no one so bad that he cannot be saved*. Isn’t that a wonderful gospel? That’s a wonderful gospel. And, Jesus died to save you. And, He rose to save you. And, He lives to save you. And, He longs to save you. And, He will save you, I promise—and, He promises—if you will trust Him.

It Pays to Serve Jesus

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 17, 1984

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 73

“But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.”

PSALMS 73:28

Outline

Introduction

- A. He Begins with a Conclusion
- B. He Begins with a Confession
- I. The Prosperity of the Sinner
 - A. He Sees the Sinner’s Prosperity
 - B. He Sees the Sinner’s Peace
 - C. He Sees the Sinner’s Pride
 - D. He Sees the Sinner’s Pleasures
 - E. He Sees the Sinner’s Perversity
 - F. He Sees the Sinner’s Pomposity
 - G. He Sees the Sinner’s Profanity
- II. The Perplexity of the Saint
 - A. He Speaks of His Cleansed Life
 - B. He Speaks of His Chastised Life
 - C. He Speaks of His Confused Life
- III. The Perspective of the Sanctuary
- IV. The Presence of the Savior
 - A. The Power of God
 - B. The Plan of God
 - C. The Promise of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Now, I want to begin reading in the first two verses—that is, Psalm 73. And, by the way, the title of the message tonight is this: “It Pays to Serve Jesus”—“It Pays to Serve Jesus.”

A. **He Begins with a Conclusion**

Now, the psalmist begins with a conclusion: he says, *“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had*

well nigh slipped.” (Psalms 73:1–2) Now, he begins with a conclusion because he doesn’t want you to think he’s a heretic, because when you read the rest of the psalm, you’re going to think the man who wrote this psalm wasn’t a very good man because he’d had some bad thoughts about God. He had been considering the character of God, and, really, he’d criticized God just a little bit. And now, as he has thought through the entire matter, as you’re going to see in a moment, he comes back and reaffirms the goodness of God. And, he doesn’t want the reader to think that he’s a hypocrite, so he begins with his conclusion. Now, most sermons end with a conclusion; this one begins with a conclusion, and the conclusion is that God is good. Now, you’d better understand that and get that down deep in your heart, because the devil doesn’t want you to know that. The devil wants you to think negatively about God. But, God is good. If the devil can get you to think negatively about God, he can get you to do almost anything that he wants you to do. And so, it begins with a conclusion.

B. **He Begins with a Confession**

It also begins with a confession. Look in verse 2: *“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.”* (Psalms 73:2) He had come close to losing his faith in God. He had become almost a backslider. He’d almost denied his love for God, and the reason for that was the seeming inequities of life. We’re going to see why his feet had slipped if we’ll look in verse 3: *“For”*—he says—*“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”* (Psalms 73:3) He’d been looking at his neighbor: his neighbor didn’t love God; his neighbor didn’t serve God; his neighbor did not care for the things of God; and yet, his neighbor seemed to have more than heart could wish. And, this man, who was a child of God, *“was envious at the foolish.”* (Psalms 73:3) He was envious at the prosperity of the wicked. It didn’t seem right. Here he’d been trying to serve God, and everything was going badly for him. And, here was a man that didn’t serve God at all, and everything was going good for that man, as we’re going to see in a moment. And, he was wondering, “Does it really pay to serve Jesus? Does it pay every day? Is every day with Jesus sweeter than the day before?” And, he almost went under when he took his eyes from the Lord and put his eyes upon the prosperity of the wicked. He didn’t go under—he almost went under, but he didn’t go under.

And, you know, there’s a big difference between *almost* and *altogether*. You see, he said, *“My feet had almost slipped.”* (Psalms 73:2) Do you know why they did not slip? Well, this is Psalm 73, but if you’ll turn to Psalms 37—well, don’t even turn to it, but just jot this verse down—verse 23: the Bible says, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD...[and] though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”* (Psalms 37:23–24) Isn’t that a beautiful thing? Now, his

feet almost slipped, but the God of Glory was upholding him.

Now, as we look in this psalm, after we get past the first two verses, which are introductory verses, there are four major thoughts that I want you to see in this beautiful, wonderful psalm. And, if you see them, I believe they'll set your heart to singing tonight, and no longer will you be envious at the fools and the prosperity of the wicked. For, you see, only a fool will envy fools. And, if you... And, you don't want to be a fool, I'm certain.

I. The Prosperity of the Sinner

Now, here's the very first thing I want you to notice: it's what I'm going to call "the prosperity of the sinner"—"the prosperity of the sinner." And, I want to read verses 3–12. Look at them with me. He says—and his confession is very clear: *"For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out [of] them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches."* (Psalms 73:3–12)

Now, here is what I want to call "the prosperity of the sinner." Here was God's man, but he had taken his eyes from the Lord and he had placed his eyes upon the ungodly. And, if you'll read this short passage, fifteen times he uses the pronouns "they," "them," "their." He's always looking at the ungodly in this passage of Scripture; he has his eyes on them. And, when he looks at them and studies them, he doesn't really see things as they are; he just sees things as he thinks they are. He—you know, you've heard the expression, "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence in the other man's pasture"—well, that's what he's doing: he's looking across the fence.

A. He Sees the Sinner's Prosperity

And look, if you will, in verse 3: he talks about *"the prosperity of the wicked."* (Psalms 73:3) Somehow he gets the distorted idea that all wicked people are prosperous and that all godly people are poor. Now, I want to tell you, dear friend, that some wicked people are prosperous and some wicked people don't prosper at all. Some godly people are poor, and some godly people are wealthy. But, in his mind right now, in his distorted point of view, he has his eye on some particular fat cat, and he just says, "All of the

wicked are prosperous.”

B. He Sees the Sinner’s Peace

Not only does he see his seeming prosperity, but he also sees his seeming peace. Look in verse 4: *“For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.”* (Psalms 73:4) That is, “When this guy comes to die, he’ll just die an easy death.” Now, the word *bands* literally means there are no “upheavals”—there are no “restrictions”—in his death. He just—he just—dies with ease. He’ll die with a smile on his face. You know, the doctor can help almost anybody to die with a smile on his face if he’ll just give him enough tranquilizers and enough drugs and whatever it is—enough pain killers. But, many people die with a smile on their face and step right into hell. Did you know that? Did you know that? Just because a man is not afraid to die doesn’t mean he’s right with God. Some men don’t fear dying because they don’t know what living is. But, here’s a man who—number one, he looks at his seeming prosperity; number two, he looks at his seeming peace.

C. He Sees the Sinner’s Pride

And then, number three: He looks at his pride. Look in verse 6, if you will, of this same psalm: he says, *“Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; [and] violence covereth them [about] as a garment.”* (Psalms 73:6) These people are strutting through the earth. They have it all, and they know how to flaunt it. They wore their pride like a necklace about their neck. And so, he’s a little envious of them, because they seem to swagger through life.

D. He Sees the Sinner’s Pleasures

And then, look again in verse 7—he sees their pleasures: *“Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.”* (Psalms 73:7) These are the kind of people who have a big car, and they’ve got a swimming pool, and they’ve got several television sets, and they’re the jet set (they take their trips). And, the poor little old saint looks over at this guy, and he says, “That fat cat—he has it all. His eyes stand out with fatness.”

E. He Sees the Sinner’s Perversity

And then, look again, if you will, in verse 8: *“They are corrupt, [they] speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.”* (Psalms 73:8) He speaks not only of their pleasures, but also of their perversity. *“They are corrupt”* (Psalms 73:8)—that is, they are rotten through and through. There’s nothing good about them. They’re filled with sin; and yet, they’re filled with pleasure.

F. He Sees the Sinner's Pomposity

Notice their pomposity in verse 9: *"They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth."* (Psalms 73:9) These people can strut sitting down. They are just—they are just—so pompous, so proud, so arrogant. They are people of the walking tongue. They just—they just—talk everywhere: *blab, blab, gab, gab*. And, they seem to get away with it; nothing slows them down.

G. He Sees the Sinner's Profanity

And, even in their speech they... We notice their profanity in verses 9–10: *"They set their mouth against the heavens...their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people"*—God's people—*"return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out [of] them."* (Psalms 73:9–10) That is, these ungodly people who seem to prosper have no fear of God before their eyes.

And, he just looks at them—he sees their prosperity; he sees their peace; he sees their pride; he sees their pleasures; he sees their perversion; he sees their pomposity; he sees their profanity—and he says, "I just can't figure it out. Where is God? I mean, if there's a God, why doesn't He judge that kind of a person? How can God rule the universe and let some people live like they live?" And so, that's the first movement in this psalm. It's what we want to call "the prosperity"—"the prosperity"—"of the sinner."

II. The Perplexity of the Saint

Now, right on the heels of that is the second movement in this psalm, which I want to call "the perplexity of the saint." Now, right up alongside the prosperity of the sinner is the perplexity of the saint, and if you'll begin reading in verse 13, you'll see that. Now, he takes his eyes from the man who's his next-door neighbor, and he turns his eyes upon himself. And, he makes this confession—verses 13–16: *"Verily"*—that means truly—*"I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I [would] speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me."* (Psalms 73:13–16)

Now, this is what I want to call "the perplexity of the saint." He looks at his own life now: he sees his own needs; he sees his own problems; he sees his own heartaches. And, if you look at this section, you'll find out that he uses the personal pronouns "I," "me," and "my" nine times. Now, he takes his eyes off "them," "theirs," and "their" and puts it on "I," "me," and "mine," and he's having a little pity party. There are three guests who are there: I, myself, and me. And, he's feeling sorry for himself, and he's drinking from the intoxicating cup of self-pity. And, he's almost about to go under. He's trying to figure it out: "Why, God? Why? Because, after all, I'm a converted man."

A. He Speaks of His Cleansed Life

Notice what he says. He speaks of his conversion in verse 13; he talks about his love for God: *“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.”* (Psalms 73:13) What does he mean, *“[I’ve] cleansed my heart in vain”*? (Psalms 73:13) That is, “It didn’t pay me to get right with you. I’ve given you my heart. I’ve been saved. My heart is clean. I’ve confessed my sin. A lot of good it did me.”

B. He Speaks of His Chastised Life

And, not only does he speak of his converted life, but he speaks, correspondingly, of his chastised life in verse 14: *“For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”* (Psalms 73:14) You know, he said, “I thought everything would be rosy when I got saved—all I had to do was walk down the aisle of Bellevue Baptist Church and shake the counselor’s hand, and from there on, I’d have no more problems.” Well, I’ve told you before, friend, if you haven’t met the devil, it’s because you and the devil have been going in the same direction. You turn around, and you’ll meet him head-on. And, *before you’re saved, you’re in collusion with the devil, and after you’re saved, you’re in collision with the devil*. And, the devil’s going to see to it that you have some problems.

But, not only is the devil going to see to it that you have some problems, but God is going to chastise His own children. You see, God does not chastise the devil’s crowd. Now, this man can’t understand it. He says, “I get chastened every morning. It seems like before the sun is up high, I get a licking from the Lord. Why is this? I just can’t understand it”—*“all the day long [I’ve] been plagued, and chastened every morning.”* (Psalms 73:14) Now, the word *chasten* means I’ve been “corrected” by the Lord. Well, it’s because God loved him. He didn’t have enough sense to know that, but Psalms 119:71 says, *“It is good for me that [I’ve] been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”* Hebrews 12:6 says, *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”*

You see, God deals with His children on a cash basis, and God deals with the devil’s crowd on a credit basis. That is, when one of God’s children sins, God chastises them immediately. That doesn’t mean they’re not God’s child; it means they are God’s child. If you’re like the man in the first paragraph—the prosperous; wicked; living high, wide, and handsome—and God doesn’t chastise you, it doesn’t mean that God is not pleased with you or that God is pleased with you. It doesn’t mean that you are not going to have any judgment. It just means that God is not dealing with you now. You see, the unsaved just treasure up their judgment. The Bible says in Romans 2:5: *“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart [treasureth] up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.”* Now, a person with a hard and impenitent heart is just laying it by; he’s just putting it in the

storehouse. You see, God deals with His children on a cash basis. That is, the moment I sin, unless I confess that sin, God begins to chastise me because He loves me. *“Whom the Lord [loves] he [chastens].”* (Hebrews 12:6) But, God doesn’t whip the devil’s kids. They get theirs at the final judgment.

C. He Speaks of His Confused Life

And so, here was a man—here was a man—who had a cleansed life. Here was a man who had a chastened life, and here was a man who had a confused life. Look in verses 15–16: he said, *“When I [sought] to know this, it was too painful for me.”* (Psalms 73:16) Or, let’s go back to verse 15: *“If I [should] say, I will speak thus; behold, I [would] offend against the generation of thy children.”* (Psalms 73:15) That is, he said, “If I were to stand up at Bellevue Baptist Church on Sunday night”—this is a free translation, of course—“and tell the folks how I’m feeling, they would be offended at me. I mean, they would say, ‘Oh, Brother So-and-So, I can’t believe you’d say that about God.’” Here he’s been—look, he’s been feeling sorry for himself because the wicked seem to prosper and he just seems to get it in the neck everywhere he turns. And, the fact that he’s got a cleansed life doesn’t seem to change it. He’s chastised. He’s just confused, and he said, “When I tried to understand it, it was just too painful for me. I couldn’t understand it. I simply couldn’t understand it.”

So, that’s the second movement in this psalm. Remember, the first movement is the prosperity of the sinner. The second movement—the perplexity of the saint. He cannot figure it out—why the righteous seem to prosper and why the godly sometimes seem to suffer.

III. The Perspective of the Sanctuary

Now, I want you to notice the third movement in this psalm. It’s what I want to call “the perspective of the sanctuary”—“the perspective of the sanctuary.” Begin to read now in verse 15, and I want to get the thought so I can just get a running start on verse 17: *“If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. [And] when I thought to know this, it was too painful for me”—*now, watch it—*“Until”—*are you ready?—*“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.”* (Psalms 73:15–17) This is what I want to call “the perspective of the sanctuary.”

Now, the psalmist, I believe, had been missing his worship. I believe he’d been missing his quiet time, and I believe he’d been missing his public worship, because he said, “I tried to understand it, and I couldn’t understand it until I went into the sanctuary of God.” And then, he began to see something that he’d forgotten. You know, it’s a sad day when you take your eyes from the Lord and put your eyes upon the faults and foibles and sins of those for whom Jesus died. The devil would love to get you to do

that, and that's exactly what this man had done: he had taken his eyes from the Lord, and he'd begun to put his eyes upon other people.

Now, he goes into the sanctuary; and now, he begins to see the majesty of God. Now, he sees the holiness of God. Now, he gets the big picture. Now, he sees things from a proper perspective. You know, you can make a big mistake if you don't see things from a proper perspective. I mean, you've got to see the whole picture. If you just look at one little day when you're being chastened, and your fat cat neighbor, who hates God, is getting along fine, you haven't seen the whole picture.

You remember the little story about the men from India who...the blind men who were examining an elephant. One man put his hand on the elephant's trunk and said, "An elephant is like a hose." And, another man put his hand on the elephant's ear, and he said, "An elephant is like a fan." And, another put his hand around the elephant's legs, and he said, "An elephant is like a tree." And, another put his hand on the elephant's side, and he said, "An elephant is like a wall." And, another one put his hand on the elephant's tail, and he said, "An elephant is like a rope." Well, all of them just had a limited perspective, and none of them could see and understand the whole elephant. And, many times all we do is see just a little particle—just a little speck—of what God is and what God is up to. And, we need to get a fresh vision of the greatness, the grandeur, the majesty, the glory of God.

And so, here is a person who gets a proper perspective. And, what had he seen? He'd seen that it's how the situation ends that really counts, and I want you to see that—I want you to see that. Look again, if you will, in verse 17: he says, "*It was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; [and] then understood I their end*"—verse 18—"*Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down [to] destruction.*" (Psalms 73:17–18) Now, a person who walks in a slippery place with nothing to hold on to is going to fall sooner or later. And, a man without the Lord Jesus—he has nothing to hold on to. In a moment, the psalmist is going to tell you what he has to hold on to. But, there's a time when this man's going to slip and fall, and his doctor can't save him. He's going to slip and fall, and his lawyer can't save him. He's going to slip and fall, and his Rolls Royce can't save him. He's going to slip and fall, and his Swiss bank account can't save him. He's going to slip and fall, and his friends cannot save him. He is in slippery places, and he's going to fall in a moment. And, when he falls in a moment, what a change there is going to be.

Now, I referred this morning to the parables of the Lord Jesus, talking about the rich man who died and went to hell. Jesus told another parable about a rich man. This man had his barns filled with plenty, and he said to himself, "What shall I do? I don't have room to bestow my goods." (Luke 12:17) He said, "I know what I'll do." He said, "I'll pull down these barns, and then I'll build bigger barns." (Luke 12:18) And then, he said, "I'll

get me a hammock and a lemonade, and I'll stretch out in the shade. And, I'll just relax and say, 'Soul, you've got it made.'" (Luke 12:19) Again, that's the way the original Greek gives it. And, he says, "I'll just have it made." And, God said to him... Listen, here's the fat cat that everybody else is going to be envious of. You say, "Well, look at that guy. Man, he's not even making money; he's just keeping score. I mean, look, he's got... He can't possibly spend it. He can't... He hasn't even got barns big enough to put it in." And, we'd all be sitting around drooling and envying, and Jesus said—God said—to him, "[You] fool, [tonight your] soul [will] be required of [you]: then whose shall those things be, which [you've] provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, [who] is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20–21) How they are destroyed! In a moment, they are utterly destroyed. Look in verse 19: "*How...they [are] brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*" (Psalms 73:19)

There's an evangelist who's now gone to heaven. His name is Bill Rice. Years and years ago, I read a story that Bill Rice wrote and gave in one of his messages. Bill Rice said that when he was a young preacher, he visited in a home of a fine Christian family, and the family, after they had dinner, said, "Preacher, would you like to go and see how we've decorated our daughter's bedroom?" He said, "I certainly would." He walked back there, and they had a lovely bedroom. But, there on the walls of that bedroom was a picture, and it was a picture of a movie actress of that day. Her name was Jean Harlow. Now, some of you are going to show your years if you nod and smile and you know who Jean Harlow is, but she was kind of a—I guess I'll tell you my age now—she was kind of the Marilyn Monroe of her day. And, she played a prostitute and so forth in a movie called *Hell's Angels*. And, it was just sort of a vixen—sort of a sex symbol—of that particular day.

And, this pastor could not believe that this girl had this picture of Jean Harlow on the wall. And, the pastor said, "Sweetheart, who is that?" Now, this is just a teenage girl. She said, "Preacher, you don't know who that is?" Said, "That's Jean Harlow." Well, he said, "Why have you got her picture on the wall?" "Oh," she said, "because I admire Jean Harlow. She's my idol." "Oh," he said, "darling, no—not a movie actress, not a person who lives that kind of a life. Aren't you a Christian girl?" She said, "Well, I'm a church member." "Well, you mean to say that that is your idol?" "Yes, sir." "Oh," he said, "darling, you don't want her for an idol." The little girl got indignant, and even though she was a little girl, she just talked right back to the preacher. She said, "Don't tell me who I need for an idol. She's the most famous woman in all Hollywood. She can have everything she wants." This little girl said, "I would give anything if I could trade places with Jean Harlow." The pastor—the preacher—was heartbroken. He tried to reason with her, but she only got indignant and angry.

That very day, when that pastor left that house, he went out and bought a newspaper,

and the headline said, “Jean Harlow Dies.” He could hardly wait. He wrapped up the newspaper, went right back to that house, and knocked on that door—said, “Come out.” She said, “You want to argue some more?” He said, “No, I just want you to see the headlines,” and he showed her the headlines: “Jean Harlow Dies.” He said, “Honey, if I know anything about the character of this girl, if you had had your choice to trade places with her right now, you’d be in hell right now—in hell.” Oh, dear friend, don’t envy the foolish—don’t. Who would—who would—envy a pig being fattened for the slaughter? Only a fool envies fools.

And, and so, here God gave this man a proper perspective. He went into the sanctuary of the Lord, and there he saw their end. He saw that they’re set in slippery places, and no matter what they have it will do them no good when that time of sudden destruction that I talked about comes. And, how quickly they are brought down; how quickly they fall. Notice the Bible: *“As a dream”—verse 20—“when one [awakens]; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.”* (Psalms 73:20–22) Now, he was saying, really, “I was—I was—a plain donkey; that’s what I was—so stupid, so stupid, like a dumb beast, envying those who do not know and love the Lord Jesus Christ.”

IV. The Presence of the Savior

Now, notice what we’ve talked about: the prosperity of the sinner, the perplexity of the saint, the perspective of the sanctuary. Now, I want you to notice how the psalmist ends this psalm: it’s what I want to call “the presence of the Savior.” I just want to show you exactly how rich you are, dear friend, even if you don’t have a big bank account. Look, if you will, in verses 23 and following: *“Nevertheless”—and oh, dear friend, if you have your own Bible, just put a star right there by that word *nevertheless* and put a circle around it—“Nevertheless I am continually with thee”—that’s why I’ve called this “the presence of the Savior”—“and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all [of] thy works.”* (Psalms 73:23, 25–28)

Here’s a man—here’s a man—who saw life now in the proper perspective, and there, the Lord Jesus was with him. And, he learned something that all of us need to learn: that life is not lived in length; life is lived in depth. And, *“a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things [that] he [possesses].”* (Luke 12:15) When a man has the Lord—truly has the Lord, truly knows the Lord—that man has several things.

A. The Power of God

He has, first of all, the power of God. Look in verse 23: *“Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by [thy] right hand”* (Psalms 73:23)—God’s sustaining power. When that rich man—that fat cat, that ungodly man—comes to die, he has nothing to hold on to. Dear friend, *“the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and...though he fall, he shall not...utterly [be] cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.”* (Psalms 37:23–24) How great—how grand—it is to know that in our hand is God’s hand. He has the sustaining power of God.

B. The Plan of God

He has the guiding counsel and plan of God. Look in verse 24 of this same chapter: *“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”* (Psalms 73:24) How wonderful to know that God is in charge of our lives. And, those of us who know Him—we don’t have to flounder around without a...like a ship without a compass, and a charter, and a sail, and a mast, and a rudder on a dark and stormy night. We have the Lord to guide us. We have God’s power. He holds us with His hand. (Psalms 37:24) We have God’s plan; He guides us with His eye. And, I’ll tell you, there’s no greater thrill than just simply to know that you’re in the will of God, serving God. It’s greater than any kind of so-called riches that a man could have.

C. The Promise of God

And then, we have God’s promise. Look what God’s promise is. It’s all of this and heaven, too. I said this morning I’d be a Christian if there were no heaven and no hell, just to know the Lord Jesus. But, notice verse 24: *“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”* (Psalms 73:24) It’s all this and heaven, too. It will be worth it when we see Jesus. “It [does pay] to serve Jesus. It pays every day. It pays every step of the way.”

I heard another story years ago. I don’t know the source of the story. Really, I believe the story is fiction, but it illustrates a point, and we’ll hear it as a parable. There was a man who had a plantation back in the days of slavery, and that man—we’ll call him Mr. George. He was a very rich man. According to this story, he was the richest man in that particular valley. He had a big white horse that he rode around on. And, Mr. George was riding around the plantation, and there, in the corner of the fence, he saw one of the old slaves. He was a Christian slave, a man named Mose (short for Moses). He was named Mose. And, Mose the slave was there in the corner of the fence. He had a little piece of fat meat; he had a little crust of dry bread, and he had his old black gnarled hands folded over that piece of fat meat and that piece of dry bread. And, he was saying something. The rich plantation owner on the big horse looked down and said, “Mose, what are you doing?” He said, “Excuse me, sir. I’m asking God to bless this

food, and I'm thanking Him." He said, "Thanking Him? You! You are thanking God? Look at you. You're down there in the dirt. You're a common slave. You've got a crust of bread and a little morsel of meat. Look at me. You see that big house up on the hill? That's my house. You see this plantation? I own it all. I don't thank God, because I earned it. This mind conceived it, and these hands have fashioned it. And, it's mine, and I'm the richest man in the valley." The old slave looked up. He said, "Yessir, boss." And, he said, "There's another thing." He said, "I've been speaking with the Lord, and the Lord has told me something: the Lord told me that tonight the richest man in the valley is going to die."

He laughed. "Ha," he said, "you and your silly superstition. Get back to work." And, he wheeled his big white horse around and rode up to the mansion, but in his brain he was hearing that statement, "The richest man in the valley is going to die tonight." He rode past the doctor's house that was a few miles down the road. He said, "Doctor, what are you doing tonight?" "Well, not much, Mr. George." He said, "How'd you like to play some cards?" "Well, if you want to." He said, "I'll be by about sundown." And, they played cards 'til ten. The doctor said, "Well, I think we'd better turn in." The rich man said, "Let's play another hand...and another hand." The doctor said, "It's almost four." He said, "Let's play another hand. Doctor, don't leave me. Stay here with me." Finally, the doctor said, "The night has ended. You've kept me here all night. The sun is coming up. What on earth ails you? You've never acted this way before." The plantation owner just laughed. He said, "Oh, doctor," he said, "I might as well confess it now." He said, "You know my old slave Mose down there? Well, I never paid much attention to that superstition, but that old man told me that the richest man in the valley is going to die tonight. And, it was just my little way of keeping a doctor near in case something happened. I guess it was kind of stupid, wasn't it?"

About that time there was a knock on the door, and another slave—this time a younger one—was there. Said, "Mr. George?" "Yes?" "Mr. George, I hate to disturb you, but we need some help. You know Mose, the old man—he died last night, and we've got to put him away; we've got to bury him. We don't have any money. Since you're the richest man in the valley, we were wondering, would you give us something to help us to put Mose away?" That plantation owner thought for a while. He said, "Yes, yes, I'll give you something, but," he said, "you're wrong. I'm not the richest man in the valley. The richest man in the valley died last night."

I want you to understand something, friend: that's only a story; I doubt very seriously if it ever happened, but it's a parable of life—a parable of life. Do you know who the richest man is? Do you know the richest man in this congregation is the man who knows Jesus best—did you know that?—the man who can say, "God, you guide me with your eye. God, you're continually with me, and afterward, Lord, you will receive me into

Glory”? There’s nothing wrong with having riches if God gives them. There’s nothing wrong with being poor if God allows it. And, I think most all of us had rather have more than to have less, if we were perfectly honest. But friend, I want to tell you something: never, never, never be envious at the prosperity of the wicked.

*It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way,
[And] though the pathway to Glory may sometimes [seem] drear
It pays to serve Jesus each day.”*

—FRANK C. HUSTON

Conclusion

Let’s bow in prayer. Father, I thank you tonight for your Word. Lord, it’s been precious to my own heart. And, I’m praying, dear Lord, that if there’s somebody here who’s been feeling sorry for themselves because, as a Christian, it seems like they’re chastised, it seems like they can’t accumulate wealth, and it seems like others who don’t know you and love you seem to have so much... O God, help us not to be so foolish as to be envious of the prosperity of the wicked, Lord, to see what we have in you—that, Lord, you’re continually with us. Lord, whom have we on earth beside thee? And whom, Lord, is there to desire beside thyself? And, Lord God, I just pray now in the name of Jesus, if there’s someone here who’s not saved—should they die tonight, Lord—I pray that even tonight they might say an everlasting “yes” to you.

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, may I be personal with you? May I ask you a personal question? How many of you tonight know the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior? I don’t want you to lift your hand. I just want to ask this question: How many of you tonight are absolutely certain that you’re saved? You know, sometimes when I ask that, you say, “Well, there he goes again. I’m getting ready to slip up my hand.” But tonight, I don’t want you to slip up your hand; I want you to examine your heart. I want you to be judgment-day honest and answer this question: Are you converted? Are you saved? Are you a child of God? If you should die this moment, are you one hundred percent certain that you would go to heaven?

You can be certain. You can be saved. Remember this: that God loves you, and He has a wonderful plan for your life. Remember that you’re a sinner, and because you’re a sinner, you’re separated from God. But, remember this, dear friend: that Jesus died for your sins, and on the cross, with His blood, He paid your sin debt—and thus potentially removing that sin and that barrier between you and God. But, also remember that you must, by faith, receive Christ into your heart. The Bible says if you will receive Him, He’ll give you the power to become a child of God. The Bible says, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” (Acts 16:31)

And so, I want to invite you to pray a prayer like this right now, where you are: “Dear God”—just pray it in your heart, if you’re not saved or not certain that you’re saved—“Dear God, I’m a sinner”—tell Him that you’re a sinner; confess it—“I’m a sinner”—the Bible says, *“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23)—“I’m a sinner, and I’m lost. And, I need to be saved, and I want to be saved. Jesus, you died to save me, and you promised to save me if I would only trust you. I do trust you, God”—tell Him that—“I do trust you, God”—tell Him from the depth of your heart—“I do trust you, God, right now, with all of my heart. Jesus, I believe that you died for my sins. I receive you, Savior, into my heart right now. Come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me—save me—Jesus”—pray it right now from the depth of your heart—“Save me, Lord Jesus.”

Now, did you pray that prayer? If you did, I want you to pray something else. Pray this way: “Thank you for saving me, Lord Jesus. I receive it by faith like a little child, and that settles it. I trust you right now to save me forever”—and now, I want you to pray one more thing—“Lord Jesus, help me never to be ashamed of you”—will you pray that?—“Lord Jesus, help me never to be ashamed of you. In your name I pray. Amen.”

Only a Fool Envies Fools

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 6, 1997

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 73

“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

PSALMS 73:3

Outline

Introduction

- A. This Psalm Begins with a Conclusion
- B. This Psalm Begins with a Confession
- C. This Psalm Begins with Confusion
- I. The Outward Look
 - A. The Prosperity of Other People
 - B. The Peacefulness of Other People
 - C. The Pridefulness of Other People
 - D. The Pleasures of Other People
 - E. The Perversity of Other People
 - F. The Pomposity of Other People
 - G. The Profanity of Other People
- II. The Inward Look
 - A. He Had a Cleansed Life
 - B. He Had a Chastened Life
 - C. He Had a Confused Life
- III. The Upward Look
- IV. The Onward Look
 - A. The Personal Presence of God
 - B. The Sustaining Power of God
 - C. The Guiding Purpose of God
 - D. The Glorious Promise of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take the Word of God and turn to Psalm 73. And, while you're turning, let me tell you again, only a fool envies fools. Sometimes we wonder, are we Christians fools—I mean, to serve the Lord, to say that we're going to come apart from the things of this world, not do the things that some people do, not have the things that some people have, not see the things that some people see, not drink the things that some people

drink, and smoke the things that some people smoke? Well, you say, “Are we being left out? Does it really pay to serve Jesus?” Well, friend, I want to say at the very beginning of this message,

*It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way.*

—FRANK C. HUSTON

A. This Psalm Begins with a Conclusion

Now, this Psalm begins with a conclusion. And, the Psalmist gives the conclusion at the beginning of the Psalm so you won't think badly of him, because he's having some hard thoughts. And so, he just starts with the conclusion. Now, here is the conclusion of the Psalm in the first verse: *“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart”* (Psalm 73:1). Now, this was his conclusion. Now, he didn't jump to this conclusion; he had to work through it.

Don't jump to conclusions. Somebody said, “Once there was a dog named August who was always jumping to conclusions. One day, he jumped at the conclusion of a mule. That was the last day of August.” Don't jump to conclusions.

The Psalmist had not jumped to a conclusion. Here is a thought out conclusion, and here was his conclusion: God is good. Now, remember what we say? God is good all the time. Got to do better than that! God is good all the time. Now, that's the conclusion. Just underscore that. That's at the beginning of the Psalm: *“Truly God is good...”*

B. This Psalm Begins with a Confession

It begins with a conclusion, and it also begins with a confession. Here's the confession in verse 2: *“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped”* (Psalm 73:2). He said, “I was just about to be a backslider. I was just about to go under. I was about to lose my faith.” Now, why? Well, look in verse 3: *“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked”* (Psalm 73:3). He was envying fools. And, because he was envying fools, he was about to lose his faith. His feet almost slipped.

Now, what bothered this man were the seeming inequities of life. He looked around at these other people, and they seemed to be prospering. And, he looked at himself, and he was having such a hard time. He asked this question: Am I wasting my time to live for God? Does it really pay to serve God?

Now, there's a little word in here that I'm very glad that is in here. It's in verse 2. Look at it: *“My feet were almost gone.”* *Almost* is not *altogether*. You see, we can have our bad moments. We can stumble and fall. But, that doesn't mean that we are down for good. This is Psalm 73. In Psalm 37, verse 23, it says, *“The steps of a good man are*

ordered by the LORD; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down” (Psalm 37:23–24). So, almost is not altogether.

C. This Psalm Begins with Confusion

So, it begins with a confession. And, he begins with a conclusion, and then with a confession, and then with confusion. Here was his confusion. What was bothering him was, why do the wicked prosper, and why do good people sometimes suffer?

Well, actually, in this Psalm the Psalmist is taking what I want to call four looks.

I. The Outward Look

First of all, he’s got his eyes on other people. He’s just looking outward at other people.

A. The Prosperity of Other People

And, he just has his eyes on Madam Got-Rocks over here, Mr. Live-Wrong over here, and Lady Luck over here, and they’re just living it up and having a big time. And so, he begins to describe them, and as he’s looking outward at others, and he’s just thinking that they’re having so much fun. Beginning in verse 3: *“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3).* He saw their prosperity.

Now, he got the idea that all wicked people are rich and all godly people are poor. Now, that’s not true, of course. Some of the most godly people have been rich, and some of the most ungodly people have been poor. But now, this man, he’s already told you that he was wrong, and he was telling you that he had a wrong view of things. But, in his heart and in his mind he saw some people, at least, who were prosperous and wicked, and he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked.

B. The Peacefulness of Other People

But, not only did he see their prosperity; he saw their peacefulness. Look, if you will, in verses 4 and 5. He says, *“For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Psalm 73:4–5).* Well, of course, that’s not true either. I mean, it’s true that he thought this. I’m not saying the Bible is not true. But, I’m saying this is his confession of some false conclusions that he had. The Bible is true when the Bible points out that this man had some wrong ideas. He said, “Well, these people, they just die easy, and they die with a smile on their face. There are no bands; that is, no restriction in their death. They just close their eyes and seem to float away. And, they don’t have any trouble. Every day is just a happy day for them.”

C. The Pridefulness of Other People

They are prosperous. They are peaceful. And, they are prideful. Look, if you will, in verse 6: *“Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain...”*—now, what he means

is they wear their arrogance around their neck like a necklace. They're proud of it. They strut—*"Pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment"* (Psalm 73:6). They brush people out of their way. They're full of rudeness, impudence, violence. Here they go, like peacocks, strutting their way to the land. He sees them.

D. The Pleasures of Other People

He sees their prosperity. He sees their peacefulness. He sees their pridefulness. Then he sees their pleasures. They seem to be having so much fun. Look, if you will, in verse 7: *"Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish"* (Psalm 73:7). It's not that they have enough; they have more than enough. And, here's this man. He was a man of God, but he looked over here at these people, and he said, "That fat cat. Where did he get all that stuff? How come he has this, does that, and can go there?" And, he's beginning now to be envious at this man because of his pleasures.

E. The Perversity of Other People

But, you see, it wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for what verse 8 tells us about his perversity. Look, if you will, in verse 8: *"They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily"* (Psalm 73:8). They are sinners through and through. They're covered with the slimy fingerprints of sin. They have the devil's initials carved on their hearts. They are as perverse as could be.

F. The Pomposity of Other People

But, add to their perversity their pomposity. Look, if you will, in verse 9: *"They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth"* (Psalm 73:9). These are the people of the walking tongue. Everywhere you hear it: on radio, television, talk shows, stand-up comics. They laugh at holy things. They talk against the things of God, the people of God. And, we say, "Where is God? Why doesn't God do something?"

G. The Profanity of Other People

And then, for the final stroke, this man's been looking at them, and he sees their prosperity, their peacefulness, their pridefulness, their pleasure, their perversity, their pomposity, and then the coup de grace: their profanity. Look, beginning in verse 9: *"They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth."* Why, they are actually speaking against God. *"Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out of them. And they say, How does God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?"* (Psalm 73:9–11). They have absolutely, totally, no respect, no fear of God.

Well, maybe he could get by, if that's all that happened; I mean, if he just saw wicked people prospering. That might be all right, if he himself could prosper a little. But

now, he gives the outward look, and he looks at other people. And, by the way, in these verses, if you'll look at the verses I've just read, he uses the pronoun *they* or *them* or *their* 15 times. *They, them, their, they, them, their.* He's looking at others. Now, let me say this: that you're going to get in trouble if you take your eyes off of Jesus and put your eyes on other people.

Now, God wants you to think positively about Him. The devil wants you to think negatively about Him. And, if your favorite topic is how bad things are and how bad people are, you're headed for a collapse. I want to tell you this. It is true that things are bad. It is true that people are bad. But, you had better not dwell on it. Don't take your eyes off of Jesus and put your eyes on the sins of those for whom Jesus died. If you do, you're going to get into trouble. And, for every glance you take at them, you gaze upon your God. So, here was the outward look.

II. The Inward Look

Now, he takes a second look, and that is an inward look. Now, beginning in verse 13, he begins to think about himself. He's been thinking about them. Now, I want you to see the personal pronoun *I, me, and my* is going to take up. Before then, it's *them, their, those*. But now, it's *I, me, and my*, beginning in verse 13: "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the children of thy generation. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me*" (Psalm 73:13–16). *I, I, I. Me, me, me. I, me, my.*

Do you see what's happened? First of all now, he's looking at others. He's looking outwardly. And now, he is looking inwardly, and he uses the personal pronoun now at least nine times. And, what is happening is he's feeling sorry for himself. He's having a pity party, and three people are there—*I, myself, me—myself* and *I*—all those. Those are the three people at his little party that he's having.

Now, the reason he's feeling sorry for himself, there are three reasons.

A. He Had a Cleansed Life

First of all, his had been a cleansed life. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain*" (Psalm 73:13). What happened is this: He came to church. He heard Adrian preach, or somebody else preach. He said, "Well, that man tells me I ought to serve God. Maybe if I would serve God, then everything would start working out for me." So, he comes. He gets his heart right, turns from every known sin, cleanses his heart, washes his hands in innocency, and he says, "Here I am. What a good boy am I!" See, he had really come to God truly, and he'd confessed his sin to God, and he thought now that his problems would be behind him. Do you know anybody like that?

Did you think that when you got saved you weren't going to have any more trouble?
Hello!

B. He Had a Chastened Life

All right, his was a cleansed life. But notice. His was a chastened life. Look in verse 14 now. He says this: *"For all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning"* (Psalm 73:14). "The sun is not up good before I start trouble. I don't have to wait till the end of the day. I meet trouble in the face every morning." Now, this is a child of God. He said, "I cleansed my heart. I got right with God. There was no unconfessed, un-repenting of sin in my life. I had a cleansed life. And now, I have a chastened life. I have been chastened."

You know, somehow he got the idea that if he gave his heart to Jesus he would not have any more trouble, heartache, pain, moan or groan. But, the Bible doesn't teach that. And, you have to disabuse yourself of that idea, or your feet are going to slip also. As a matter of fact, let me give you some Scripture. God loves us so much that He gives us trouble. Psalm 119, verse 71—the Bible says, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted"* (Psalm 119:71). Boy, how many would say that?

I just came from the hospital. I was at the hospital at a quarter to six coming over here, and it was an amazing thing. I went just to see one person. But, walking through the corridor of the hospital, Joyce and I met person after person, and we had to go to this room, to this room, to this room. Not had to—wanted to. But, they're there. And, we met and prayed with three of the most godly, wonderful people that I know. And yet, they love the Lord Jesus. I don't think they're there because of their own personal sin, but they're being chastised. They're going through heartache. They're going through difficulty. David said, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:71).

I want to ask you a question. Think of the time that things were going for you absolutely wonderful. You didn't have any trouble; no heartache, no sickness, no financial reverses; all of your children were fine, your loved ones were fine, your health was good; you were being entertained, you were enjoying church, you were enjoying your service to God. Think of that time, whenever that time was now: the best, the highest, time that you've known. All right now, I want you to think of another time. I want you to think of the most heartache you've known; I mean, the deepest valley you've been through; when your heart was aching and breaking, when you were faced with insurmountable odds. Do you have both of those times in your mind?

Now, I want to ask you a third question. Which time did you grow the most? Which time did you grow the most? When did you have to search your heart, and when did you draw closer to God? I'll tell you I when it was: when you were going through the dark

valley. That is absolutely true.

*I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.*

—ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

Is that not true? Folks, that's just the way it is.

And, the Psalmist said, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."* And, did that mean because this man was having trouble that God didn't love him? No, it didn't mean that. As a matter of fact, it meant that God did love him. Hebrews 12, verse 6: "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens" (Hebrews 12:6). That's what the Bible says. You say, "Well, I don't understand it." Don't try to understand it; believe it. Believe it! "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens."

So, here was a man who had been cleansed. He had a cleansed life. And then, he had a chastened life. You say, "Well, Adrian, why doesn't God chasten the unsaved? Why did these people that He described, how could they live that way and not have God chastise them?" Because they were not saved! Let me give you a great verse, Romans 2, verse 5. God is speaking to the unsaved, and He says, *"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Romans 2:5).

Now, what does that mean? In plain English, God says, "Because of your hard heart you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." There's a day of wrath coming, and you are just putting wrath in the bank. You see, what does that mean? It doesn't mean that these people have gotten away with their sin. These people that He just described, this proud bunch, this prosperous bunch, this profane bunch, this pompous bunch of people, it doesn't mean that God is not going to deal with them. The Bible just simply says that after their hard and impenitent heart, they're treasuring up wrath. They're just laying it by.

You see, I often use this illustration. God deals with His children on a cash basis. God deals with the devil's group on a credit basis. When you and I need chastening, God gives it to us day by day, moment by moment. But, God does not chasten the devil's crowd. He just lets them treasure up wrath till the final judgment is coming. God deals with them as criminals. He deals with us as sons.

C. He Had a Confused Life

So, he had a cleansed life. He had a chastened life. But, as a result of that, because he did not understand God and the way God works, he had a confused life. Look in verses 15 and 16 of this same Psalm. So, he says in verse 15, *“If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children”* (Psalm 73:15). He said, “If I were to stand up in prayer meeting on Wednesday night and say what I really think, people would say, “Ooooo.” I would offend them. But, he says, “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me. I could not figure it out.” Why do the ungodly prosper? Why are the godly chastened?

III. The Upward Look

So, he had an outward look. He’s looking at other people. He has an inward look. He looks at himself, and he’s confused about it. Then, folks, he takes an upward look—he takes an upward look. Look, if you will, in verse 23. I want you to see how this Psalm just changes. Look in verse 23: *“Nevertheless...”*—now, folks, that’s a good transition right there—*“Nevertheless”*—he says—*“I am continually with thee”* (Psalm 73:23). Now, begin in verse 16 and see how he gets to this place. In verse 16, he says, *“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee”* (Psalm 73:16–22). Now, that’s the reason I said I’m going to speak on the fact only a fool envies fools. He says, “Lord, I was envious at the wicked and the foolish.” And then, he says, “I was a fool for doing that.”

Now, what happened is this: he now takes an upward look. He says, “I couldn’t understand it. It was too painful for me.” Until verse 17, he says, “Until I went into the sanctuary of the Lord...” Do you know what that tells me? He’d been missing the worship service. He had been missing the worship service. He had not been in the sanctuary of the Lord. Now, what he has done, he has put his eyes on the sins of those for whom Jesus died. He had turned his eyes inward and had a little pity party. But, he had lost a view of the awesome glory and majesty of Almighty God. That’s the reason the Bible says, in Hebrews 10, verse 25, we’re not to forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is”* (Hebrews 10:25).

Don’t you quit coming to the worship service. Friend, you need to be in the worship service. I need to be in the worship service. Brother Jim Whitmire reminded us when we had our worship service this morning that the Lord Jesus is here, that He is literally,

actually in our midst. He is singing praises in the midst of His brethren. And, He tells us, in Matthew chapter 18, “Where two or three are gathered together in His name, that He is there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

And so, what he is saying is that, “I now took the long look.” Look in verse 17: “I went into the sanctuary of God; and there understood I their end.” Now, if you want to understand something, see, friend, not how it seems, but how it is going to end. Get a proper perspective. Most of us just don’t have the total picture. We don’t have the whole story.

There’s the poem about those Hindustani men who, they were blind and they went out to examine the elephant. You remember the story? And, one of them took an elephant by the nose, one of these blind men, and said, “An elephant is very much like a hose.” Another one said, “No, you’re wrong. An elephant is very much like a tree,” because he had the elephant by the leg. Another one said, “You’re both wrong, because an elephant is very much like a wall.” He was feeling the sides of the elephant. Another said, “You’re all wrong, because an elephant is very much like a rope,” because he had the elephant by the tail. Another said, “Oh, you’re all wrong, because an elephant is very much like a fan.” He had the elephant by the ear. And, another said, “No, everybody else is wrong by me. An elephant is like a spear,” because he had the elephant by the tusk. Of course, each one had a part of the truth, but none of them had all of the truth. An elephant is like an elephant.

And, we get in trouble sometime when we just see things from one perspective. We look at people, and we say, “Well, look how they’re prospering.” We look at ourselves, and we say, “Look how I’m suffering.” And then, we may say, “Well, it doesn’t pay to serve Jesus.”

But, here was a man who had taken that outward look. He took that inward look. Then, he took the upward look. He went into the house of God. He got a vision of God in His awesome majesty, and God gave him a glimpse into the future. And, there he saw their end. He said, “They’re in slippery places.” They may think they’re secure, but the next moment they are utterly consumed with terrors.”

That rock star, teenager, that you envy, 15 seconds from now may be in the fires of Hell—in the fires of Hell! That man driving that big automobile that you are envious of with that bottle of booze by his side—five gallons of gas and a pint of gin, and all they found was a pile of tin—he’s gone! Utterly consumed! And, in hell!

Jesus took a page from eternity. Jesus told about a man, a fat cat. He had barns. He had a farm. He had a harvest. He couldn’t put it all in his barn, so he said, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll tear down my barns, and I’ll build bigger barns, and I’ll put it all in there. And then, I’ll say to my soul, “Eat, drink, be merry.” And, I’m going to put me out a hammock. I’m going to get me some lemonade. I’m going to stretch out. I’ll have it made.” And,

Jesus said, “Thou fool, this night your soul will be required of you”—this night! He had a seizure, maybe a heart attack. Who knows what happened to him? He thought he was in perfect health. He said, “Thou hast much goods and many years” (Luke 12:19–20). He had a few moments, and he left it all. Those are the people that we tend to envy.

The Psalmist said, “I went into the sanctuary of God and there I considered their end. I considered what would happen to them.”

A preacher friend went to visit a home. And, it was a farm home. And, they had the preacher, literally, for lunch, for dinner. And, well, they didn’t eat him, but I mean, he was a guest there for dinner. I do know some people who do have roast preacher for lunch, but that wasn’t what I’m talking about. And, they had him there as a guest for their dinner. And, after the dinner—this is a true story—they said to this man, Bill Rice, they said, “Pastor, would you like to see our daughter’s bedroom? We’ve redecorated the bedroom for our daughter.” They had a lovely daughter, a teenager. And, he said, “Yes, I would.” And, he went back there to see the bedroom, and it was beautifully done. But, he looked up on the wall, and there was a picture of a Hollywood actress who was known for her immorality, who was known for her vileness, who was known for her filth, who was known for her profanity and her adulteries, and her big picture was on the wall. He said to her, “Sweetheart, whose picture is that? Why do you have that picture on the wall?” She said, “Don’t you know who that is?” and she described this woman and said, “She has everything. Why, she’s got fame. She has cars. She has money. She can go wherever she wants. Everybody loves her. She is my idol.” “Oh,” he said, “No! No! She’s not a believer. She’s not a Christian. She is a vile, wicked woman. You’re supposed to be a good girl. Don’t say that is your idol.” She said, “Well, it is my idol.” She said, “If I could be anybody in the world, I would want to be this woman.” She said, “I would give anything if I could trade places with this woman.” That man of God’s heart was broken, and I can understand why. He said, “No, don’t say that. That is wrong. You don’t want to be like her.” The little girl, only a little girl, and he’s a grown preacher, she got indignant; I mean, she lipped off at him. She said, “Don’t tell me who I want to be like. I know whom I want to be like. You’re not going to change my mind.” And, she spoke back to the man of God.

His heart was grieved—grieved. He left that farmhouse, got in his automobile, and drove away. And, he picked up a newspaper—this is a true story—opened the newspaper, and there was the story of the tragic death of that woman, that same starlet, that same one there whose picture was on the wall. And, though she was still young and seemingly vivacious and full of life, suddenly and quickly she was gone. As the Bible says, “Thou hast set their feet in slippery places.” She was consumed with terrors, no indication she had repented of her sin and given her heart to Jesus Christ. That preacher took that newspaper and drove right back to that house, knocked on that door.

That young girl came to the door again, and she said, “Have you come to preach to me again?” He said, “No, I didn’t come to preach to you at all. I just came delivering the news,” and gave her a newspaper, and said, “Please read this,” and went away.

That was in a revival meeting that night when that preacher preached. One of those down the aisle was that girl with tears in her eyes and saying, “May God have mercy upon me! If God had let me do what I wanted to do, if God would have let me trade places with that woman, I would be in Hell tonight.”

That’s what the Psalmist is saying. Only a fool envies fools. Only a fool envies fools. Only a fool envies fools. He says, “So foolish was I. I was like a beast. I was like an animal.” He had to see this from God’s perspective. He had to take the long look. He had to look into eternity. He had to see things from the eyes of God. “I went into the sanctuary of God, and there understood I their end.”

IV. The Onward Look

Number one: He took an outward look. He looked at others. Number two: He took an inward look and felt sorry for himself. Then, thank God, he took an upward look. He saw things from God’s perspective. And then, last of all, he took an onward look. He saw what he had coming to him—not only what they had coming to them, but what he has coming to himself—and he considered just how rich he was. Look, if you will, in verse 22: “*So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee*” (Psalm 73:22). And now, he mentions four things that every child of God has, and I want you to listen to these four things. If you’re feeling sorry for yourself because you’re a child of God, I want you to see tonight how gloriously, wonderfully rich and blessed you are. And, I pray God you will never, never, never, never be envious of the people of this world. What four things did he see?

A. The Personal Presence of God

Number one: He saw the personal presence of God. Look in verse 23: “*Nevertheless I am continually with thee*” (Psalm 73:23). Now, you think of that. Can you imagine what it would be like to be without Him, to be without Jesus? I can’t even conceive that. I love Jesus. Hey, folks, I love Him. I mean, I don’t just know about Him. I love Jesus. I am continually with Him. He is continually with me. I find myself talking to Jesus all the time. Do you? I mean, just going down the road talking to Jesus, praising the Lord. He is with me.

*He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own.*

—C. AUSTIN MILES

I wouldn’t take anything—nothing—for the joy of His presence in my heart day by day.

Don't you feel envious of some slimy rock star, some filthy pornographer, some ungodly sports idol, some fornicator, some sodomite, some... Hey, folks, I'd rather eat dirt than do what they do.

B. The Sustaining Power of God

Thank God we have the very presence of God. There's the personal presence of God. But, beside the personal presence of God, there is the sustaining power of God. Look again in verse 23: *"Thou hast holden me by my right hand"* (Psalm 73:23). These folks are in slippery places. When they slip, there's nobody to hold them. The Psalmist said, "My feet had well nigh slipped" (Psalm 73:2). But, God was holding him. God is there. Not only do I have God's presence, but I have God's power who keeps me. I'm kept by the power of God.

I was saved as a teenage boy about 14 years of age. And, now I'm almost 40 years of age. I want to tell you something. All that time He has held me and kept me. Do you think that I've stayed on the trail this long because I'm so strong, so smart, so good, so wise? No, friend. There's One who has never let me go. Praise His name! There is One who has put His mighty hand around my hand, and He has held me. What a wonderful, wonderful salvation we have!

C. The Guiding Purpose of God

And, the psalmist saw the personal presence of God, the sustaining power of God, and the guiding purpose of God. Look, if you will, in verse 24 here: *"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel"* (Psalm 73:24). God has a purpose for me. He has a purpose for you. And, God guides us with His counsel.

The other day I was dealing with some people who had a problem. We said, "What will we do?" I said, "We'll go to God and get the answer." Because what does God say? If we need wisdom, we can ask God, and He'll give it to us (James 1:5). And, He won't fail to give it. He will. He'll not scold us for asking. If we ask in faith, He guides us with His counsel. I've been old enough, I'm old enough now, I've been on the trail long enough to know, folks, that there is an unseen hand that guides the people of God. God leads His dear children along, as we sang this morning:

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;...*

God leads His dear children along.

—GEORGE A. YOUNG

All the way my Savior leads me;

What have I to ask beside?

Can I doubt His tender mercy,

Who through life has been my Guide?

—Fanny J. Crosby

D. The Glorious Promise of God

Now, think about it. His presence. His power. His purpose. And then, His glorious promise. Look at it here in verse 24. Verse 24 says, *“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory”* (Psalm 73:24). A long time ago down at Merritt Island I heard Jim Whitmire lead our choir in a song, and I said, “Jim, I just believe I want you to sing that at my funeral. I don’t know whether you remember it or not, Jim, but our choir sang it a number of times since then: “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus” (Esther Kerr Rusthoi). And, it will, brother. It will! Oh, He’ll guide us with His counsel, and afterwards receive us into glory.

Why should we envy those people? Friend,

*It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way.*

—Frank C. Huston

Take your eyes off the sins of those for whom Jesus died. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Get your eyes on the glory and majesty of God. And, begin to thank God for the things that you have.

Conclusion

Here’s the conclusion that this Psalmist comes to one more time. He says, in verse 25, *“Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works”* (Psalm 73:25–28). Only a fool envies fools.

When Life Doesn't Seem Fair

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 12, 2000

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 73

“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

PSALMS 73:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Prosperity of the Sinner
 - A. He Sees Their Possessions
 - B. He Sees Their Peace
 - C. He Sees Their Pride
 - D. He Sees Their Pleasures
 - E. He Sees Their Perversity
 - F. He Sees Their Pomposity
 - G. He Sees Their Profanity
- II. The Problems of the Saint
 - A. He Had a Cleansed Life
 - B. He Had a Chastened Life
 - C. He Had a Confused Life
- III. The Perspective of the Sanctuary
- IV. The Presence of the Savior
 - A. The Presence of God
 - B. The Power of God
 - C. The Purpose of God
 - D. The Promise of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 73, would you, please. And, when you found it, look up here. I've already told you the title of our message tonight is "When Life Doesn't Seem Fair." The writer of this Psalm begins with a conclusion. Now, that's a strange thing. Somebody said, "What makes a good talk?" And, a friend answered, "A good introduction and a good conclusion as close together as possible."

Well, this man begins with a conclusion. Now, he gives the conclusion first, because if he didn't give the conclusion first, you might think he was an apostate or an unbeliever. So, here's the conclusion in verse 1: *"Truly God is good to Israel, even to*

such as are of a clean heart" (Psalm 73:1).

Now, he has given this conclusion, and he has not done it lightly. He has thought about it. It's not a conclusion that he has jumped to. It's kind of bad to jump to a conclusion.

Somebody wrote these words: "Once there was a dog named August who was always jumping at conclusions. One day he jumped at the conclusion of a mule. That was the last day of August."

This man is not jumping to a conclusion. He has thought about this, and he is saying, surely God is good. Now, I want you to remember that. I want you to remember that. God is good, all the time.

Now, what the devil wants to do is to get you thinking negatively about God. If the devil can get you to thinking negatively about God, he's opened you up to all kind of mayhem and mischief. Say it, believe it, write it upon the tablet of your heart, never forget it: God is good, no matter what. Say *amen*. "Truly..."—he says—"Truly God is good." Amen? Yeah, verily, God is good.

He begins with a conclusion, and he also begins with a confession. Notice the confession now in verse 2: "*But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped*" (Psalm 73:2). That is, I had almost backslidden, slipped away from God, turned from the faith. I had almost become an apostate. I had almost lost my faith. And, he confesses that at the beginning. He had been thinking, "Does it really pay to serve Jesus? Is life really fair? I wanted to serve God. I endeavored to serve God. And, what good has it done me?" And, he almost slipped. But, almost is not altogether. Thank God for that.

The sister Psalm to 73 is Psalm 37. Just reverse it. And, in Psalm 37, verse 23, he says, "*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand*" (Psalm 37:23–24). This man had almost slipped, but thank God there is a God that keeps us from slipping.

He saw four things. And, I want you to see these four things. I want you to get the same perspective, the same viewpoint, the same thoughts that the writer of this Psalm had, because you will need them in these last days because it's open season on Christians. There's going to be persecution. Besides any persecution, there's going to be disappointment. There are going to be troubles and heartaches and tears and fears. And, you're going to wonder what went wrong. I thought, that we sang "Victory in Jesus" and, "It pays to serve Jesus. It pays every day. It pays every step of the way," and it doesn't look to me like it's paying off. Life doesn't seem fair.

Let me give you now these four thoughts. Now, I pray God that He will write them on your heart. They are going to come directly out of this Psalm.

I. The Prosperity of the Sinner

First of all, here's the first thing this man saw. He saw the prosperity of the sinner—the prosperity of the sinner. Look, if you will, beginning in verse 3, and he'll tell you what his problem was: *“For I was envious at the foolish...”*—he's envious of fools. Now, listen to me. Only a fool envies fools. But, he confessed it. He said—*“I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them”* (Psalm 73:3–10). That is, these people taste the last drop of life, these wicked people. He's looking around now. Remember, he's a believer. He's been serving God.

A. He Sees Their Possessions

And, he looks at these people and he sees their plenty. He sees their possessions. Look in verse 3: *“I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”* Now, let me say this: not all godly people are poor. And, not all wicked people are rich. That is not a fact, but this is what this man had his eyes on. He just picked out some prosperous wicked people and set his eyes on them. He didn't have the total picture, but he looks at them and he sees their prosperity.

B. He Sees Their Peace

And then, he sees their peace. Look in verse 4: *“For there are no bands in their death:”—*that is, they die an easy death—*“but their strength is firm”* (Psalm 73:4). He just sees them. They come to the deathbed—you'd think they'd be crying out to God for mercy. No. They just die with a smile on their face. You see, a man may not fear dying because he doesn't know what living is. He doesn't understand the judgment. And so, they live high, wide, and handsome, and die. This man looks at that, and he says, “Look at their prosperity. Why, look at their peacefulness.”

C. He Sees Their Pride

And then, he sees their pride. Look in verse 6: *“Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covers them like a garment”* (Psalm 73:6). Why, they wear pride like a gold chain around their neck. They strut. He sees these people—they're so arrogant they can strut sitting down. And, he sees them in verse 6. Look at them. Look how they wear their pride. Look how violent they are, living for self and self alone.

D. He Sees Their Pleasures

And then, he sees their pleasures. Look in verse 7: *“Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish”* (Psalm 73:7). They’ve got stuff in the garage. They’ve got stuff in the in the attic. They have stuff in the closets. They have money in the bank. “That fat cat—he doesn’t need all that stuff. Here I am trying to serve God, and I have to try to beat my checks down to the bank lest I be overdrawn. And, I’m supposed to be a believer. Where’s all this cash and Cadillacs I hear about on television from the joy boys?” Oh no, here he sees their pleasures.

E. He Sees Their Perversity

And then, it’s compounded by their perversity. Look in verse 8: *“They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily”* (Psalm 73:8). What he’s saying is, hey, they are rotten through and through. They are corrupt.

F. He Sees Their Pomposity

And then, he sees their pomposity. Oh, they are so pompous! Look in verse 9: *“They set their mouth against the heavens, their tongue walketh through the earth”* (Psalm 73:9). These are the people with a walking tongue. Boy, I’ve never heard so much pomposity, so much arrogance, as we’re hearing today! There’s absolutely no fear of God in the eyes of so many wicked today. This man sees this.

G. He Sees Their Profanity

And then, he sees their profanity. Look, if you will, in verses 9 and following. He says here, *“They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth”* (Psalm 73:9). There’s no fear of God. They take God’s name in vain.

And, he looks at these people, their prosperity, their peace, their pride, their pleasures, their perversity, their pomposity, their profanity, and he says, “Now, God, that’s not fair—that’s not fair. These are wicked people.” And, if you’re not careful, you are going to become like this man. You are going to take your eyes off of Jesus, put your eyes on the sins of those for whom Jesus died. You’re going to begin to think negatively about God, and your feet are going to slip, if you’re not careful.

II. The Problems of the Saint

So, the very first thing I want you to see is the prosperity of the sinner. But now, secondly, it is compounded by what I want to call the problems of the saint. If the sinner just prospered, and the saint did too, it might be all right. But, look now in verse 13. After he’s been looking outward, he looks inward and he says, *“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should*

offend against the generation of thy children” (Psalm 73:13–15).

Now, what’s this man doing? He’s beginning to look in. He’s beginning to drink the intoxicating cup of self-pity. He’s beginning to feel sorry for himself. And, in these verses he uses the words *I*, *me*, and *mine* just nine times in just these few verses. He is egocentric rather than Christ-centered. He’s feeling sorry for himself. He’s having a pity party. Three guests—I, myself, and me—are attending that little pity party.

A. He Had a Cleansed Life

And, why is he feeling sorry for himself? Well, first of all, he had a cleansed life. It’s not that he was harboring sin in his heart. Look: *“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain.”* In other words, what good did it do me? *“[I] washed my hands in innocency.”* He had come to God. He confessed his sin. He had cleansed his heart. He said, “As far as I know, there is no unconfessed sin between my me and my God. And, he was sincere about that. He had a cleansed life.

B. He Had a Chastened Life

But, he also had a chastened life. Look in verse 14: *“For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning”* (Psalm 73:14). You would think that if a man loved God, served God, had his life clean, living with a clear conscience in innocency, God would be pouring out blessing upon him. But, he said, “I don’t get blessing. I get chastening. Every morning it begins again.” He’s expecting joy and happiness, and it didn’t come.

Well, why? Well, you need to learn this. Right now let me just slow down and tell you this. God deals with the devil’s crowd by credit. He deals with His own people by cash. Now, what’s the difference? Well, if you a child of God, God will chastise you whenever you need it. That chastisement may be a correcting chastisement if you’ve done something wrong, or it may be just a chastisement to cause you to grow in the grace and knowledge. It may be a discipline. David said, in the Psalms, *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:71). Many times we see clearly only when we see tears through eyes that have been washed by tears. And, sometimes God will chastise us because we’ve done wrong. It’s not a sign that He doesn’t love us. It’s a sign that He does love us. Remember Hebrews 12, verse 6? “For whom the Father loves He chastens”—“whom the Father loves He chastens” (Hebrews 12:6).

Now, don’t ever forget that. Because how does God deal with the devil’s crowd? If this man, this woman, these people who live high, wide, and handsome, and arrogantly, they sin against God, does God step in and chastise them? No. As a matter of fact, God may step away from them. Three times in Romans 1 it says, *“God...gave them up”* (Romans 1:24), and *“God gave them up”* (Romans 1:26), and *“God gave them over”*

(Romans 1:28). And then, he says in Romans 2, *“But after thy hardness...”*—Romans 2:5, I believe—*“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath”*—*“wrath against the day of wrath.”* After your hardness and impenitent heart, you’re treasuring up wrath. You’re just putting wrath in the bank waiting for it. And, one day the judgment comes against the day of judgment, treasuring up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath. That is, the judgment day. So, you’re just laying it by.

Now, you may be an unsaved person here tonight, and you say, “Look, I get along better than my Christian neighbor.” Sure you do. Sure you do, because God’s not going to touch you. “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.”

Sometimes when my children were little, there would be a row out in the front yard, and there are some children saying things and doing things they ought not to do. And, Joyce would call two of them in the house and administer a little *peach tree tea* to those two children. Now, one thing she never did do, and you better not do in this day, is to call the neighbor’s kids in and give them a whipping. Isn’t that right? You don’t whip the neighbor’s kids. You leave them alone. Now, if their daddy wants to whip them, he can do so. But, you don’t touch them. They’re not yours. “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6).

Now, my children used to say to me, “You know, Dad, it’s the strangest thing. We can’t get away with anything. You find out about it. You know it. Somehow it just comes to light.” I said, “That’s right. God loves you. God loves you too much to let you get away with that kind of foolishness.”

Friend, if you can live in sin, and God doesn’t chastise you, don’t boast about it; don’t brag about it. You see, God deals with the devil’s crowd on a credit basis. They’re just putting it in the bank, laying it aside. Again, Romans 2:5: *“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath.”* But, if you’re a child of God, God will chasten you—and as this man says, every morning if you need it.

C. He Had a Confused Life

And so, he had a cleansed life, and he had a chastened life. But then, he had a confused life. He couldn’t understand it. And, this was his problem. Look now in verse 15 and following at this same thing. He said, *“If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children”* (Psalm 73:15). “If I stood up at church and I told people how I feel, that I’m about finished with this thing called the faith, my feet have just about slipped, I’ve had it, I’m trying to serve God, it doesn’t do me any good whatsoever. And, I see these fat cats out here, these wicked people, and they seem to have more than their heart can wish. Why is it? It’s just not fair!” He said, “I can’t even

let people know what I'm thinking." He said, "I would offend them." And then, he said, "I tried to figure it out." Look in verse 16: "*When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me*" (Psalm 73:16). "I just can't figure it out."

III. The Perspective of the Sanctuary

So, what you see, first of all, is the prosperity of the sinner. And then, you see the problems of the saints. Now, let's move to the third thing that he saw. And, this is the perspective of the sanctuary—the perspective of the sanctuary. Begin to read now in verse 17. Well, let's hook verse 17 to verse 16: "*When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until...*"—now, if you don't mind writing in your Bible, just put a circle around the word *until*—"until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image" (Psalm 73:16–20).

Here's what he's done now. He's gone into the house of God, and there he gets a brand new perspective. I call it the perspective of the sanctuary. "Until I went into the sanctuary of the Lord..." You know what I believe was wrong with this man? I believe, for one thing, he had been missing the worship services. I believe he'd been missing the assembly of God.

You know, the Bible says, in Hebrews 10, verse 25, we're not to forsake "*the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:25). Folks, listen to me. The closer we get to the Second Coming of Jesus, the more we need one another. We need to encourage one another. We need to exhort one another. But, this man had been away from the sanctuary, and he'd been away, therefore, from the presence of the Lord. If that was true in the Old Testament, how much more true is it in the New Testament, where Jesus said, in Matthew 18, verse 20, "*For where two or three are gathered...in my name, there I am in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:20).

I'm going to tell you about being in this service tonight. You are richer, stronger, and full of faith more for having been here tonight. You are. Just the praise. Just to see these boys and girls. Just to hear this music. Just to meet a brother. Just to meet a sister. Just to see the smile. Just to feel the glory of God. There is something about the perspective of the sanctuary that is wonderful.

Now, there are a lot of folks tonight out all over town. They don't believe in Sunday night worship. You pass a lot of closed churches on your way to Bellevue on Sunday night.

The former pastor of this church had preached on Sunday morning, invited people

back Sunday night, and a lady who was visiting said to him, said, “Well, in our church we only have to go once a Sunday.” Dr. Lee said, “If I had to listen to what you have to listen to, once a Sunday would be enough for me.”

I’m so grateful that we can come and reinforce one another and reinvigorate one another. See, when he went into the sanctuary, here’s what he saw. He saw what is really important. It’s how a matter comes out. Look in verse 17. He said, “I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end” (Psalm 73:17). He said, “They’re like someone in slippery places” (Psalm 73:18).

Now, that man may look like he has everything. I was in Fort Lauderdale witnessing to a man. The pastor said, “I want you to talk to this man; he’s a very successful businessman.” And so, we went to a nice restaurant. I sat down and talked to this man. He was young. He was handsome. He was very, very smart. And, he was making money so fast he couldn’t count it. And so, after a while I moved the conversation over to Jesus. And, listen. I wasn’t after him for his money. There was nothing he could do for me. I wanted to bring him to Jesus. I looked at him. He was very much like that rich young ruler. And, you would never have met a more affable, nice man: just as pleasant, as kind, as hospitable, as funny, as witty, as charming as any man could be. But, when I began to move the subject to Jesus, I saw him stiffen a little bit—change the subject. But, I brought it back. And, again, he kind of adroitly changed the subject. But, I brought it back and began to close in a little bit, talking to him about Jesus. And, finally it came out. He said, “Preacher, that’s all right for some people. I don’t need that. I’ve got everything. I’ve got money. I’ve got family. I’ve got health. I have it all.” I just decided I’d hit him between the running lights. I said, “I want to tell you something, mister. All that has to happen to you is for an air bubble to hit your brain, and you’ll become a slobbering idiot.”

You know, people think that they have everything, they have it fine. They are in slippery places. You may not make it home from church tonight. You don’t know what’s going to happen. “What is your life but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away?” (James 4:14).

So, God brought him into the sanctuary, and he said, “Now, son, you’ve taken the lean look. Take the long look. Look out there and see what’s going to happen.” *“I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end”* (Psalm 73:17).

Didn’t Jesus say the same thing in the Gospels, in Luke chapter 12, where He took a page from the book of eternity. There was a man. He’d built barns. He couldn’t put all of his goods in the barn. He said, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll pull down my barn. I’ll build bigger barns. I’ll put all my stuff in there. And then, I will say, ‘Soul, take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry. Thou hast much good laid up for many years.’” But, his clock was slow. He said “many years.” God said, “Thou fool, this night your soul shall be required of

you.” Then, whose shall those things be? Here was a man one moment boasting about his possessions; the next moment he wakes up in Hell. You read Luke chapter 12, it may not be the same rich man that Jesus describes—a rich man in Hell (Luke 12:16–20).

And so, this man, this Psalmist now, when he has the perspective of the sanctuary, he says, “Oh, how foolish I was!” Look in verse 21: *“Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.”* What does that mean in plain English? “I was so ashamed of myself. I was so grieved for thinking this way about God.” *“So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee”* (Psalm 73:21–22). “God, what a dumb donkey I was! Here I am, like a stupid animal, like a beast, envying fools. I was envious of the foolish, at the prosperity of the wicked.” Again, I want to say, only a fool envies fools.

IV. The Presence of the Savior

And then, let’s go on to the final thing here. When life doesn’t seem fair, you might look around and see the prosperity of the sinners, the problems of the saints, you get the perspective of the sanctuary, and then you end up rejoicing in the presence of the Savior. Notice now as this Psalm, this wonderful Psalm, ends. And, it’s such a blessing to me. Now, he begins to think about what he has. I love verse 23. And, again, if you want to underscore a key word, underscore the first word there, *nevertheless*. I have a motto in my office, just one word: “Nevertheless”—“Nevertheless”; just that one word: “Nevertheless.” What? Nevertheless what? *“Nevertheless I am continually with thee”* (Psalm 73:23).

A. The Presence of God

Now, what he is saying is there is the personal presence of God. Now, you think about it. I thought about this. What would it mean for me, for you, not to have the presence of Jesus? You know, our faith is the one truth faith. But, if Islam is true, if Buddhism is true, if some of these other religions are true... I cannot imagine—I cannot imagine being anywhere else or having anything else but Jesus. I mean, His presence—thank God for His presence. The dear Savior who says, *“Lo, I am with you”* (Matthew 28:20).

B. The Power of God

There’s the personal presence of God. And then, there’s the personal power of God. Look again in verse 23: *“Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand”* (Psalm 73:23). I have seen God bring me through so many things. Joyce and I last night were up late. She was sharing some things with me. I had to fight back the tears to think of the goodness of God, the presence of God in my life. One of the things that I wrote in that little box of blessings, that crown that we brought this morning, I thanked God for His power in my life all of these years, from the time He

called me as a high school student into the ministry, for almost now 50 years of ministry. Next year we'll celebrate 50 years preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, Jesus has never failed. And, He has never let go. I wouldn't take the whole wide world for that. That's what the Psalmist says when his eyes are opened: *"Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand."*

C. The Purpose of God

There is the presence of God. There is the power of God. And, there is the purpose of God. Look in verse 24: *"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel"* (Psalm 73:24). Oh, we're not like a ship without a mast, without a sail, without a compass, without a rudder on a dark and stormy night.

*All the way my Savior leads me;
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy,
Who through life has been my Guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.*

—FANNY J. CROSBY

D. The Promise of God

There is the presence of God. There is the power of God. There is the purpose of God. And then, there is the promise of God. It gets better. Look in verse 24: *"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory"* (Psalm 73:24). We're going to Heaven. These other people are going to Hell. Why envy sinners? Think of what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ—think of what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I love that song: "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus" (Esther Kerr Rusthoi). Jim, I remember the first time I ever heard that down at Merritt Island. The choir came out and sang that song. If you're around when they put me to bed with a shovel, you might sing that. "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, the One who is with us continually, the One who holds us by His hand, the One who guides us by His counsel, and the One who will receive us into glory."

Conclusion

Now, he comes to a conclusion, as I must do. Begin now in verse 25 and see the conclusion. He begins to think, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the*

strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all His works” (Psalm 37:25–28).

Friend, look up here and let me tell you something. It pays to serve Jesus. Don't you let the devil get you to thinking negatively about God. You take your eyes off of these Hell-bound sinners and never be envious of them.

*It pays to serve Jesus, it pays every day,
It pays every step of the way,
Though the pathway to glory may sometimes be drear,
It pays to serve Jesus each day.*

—FRANK C. HUSTON

Do you believe that? Amen? I believe it with all of my heart.

The Generation To Come

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 28, 1998

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 78

“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”

PSALMS 78:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. We Must Preserve Our History
- II. We Must Retain Our Memory
 - A. The Lust of the Flesh
 - B. The Lure of the World
 - C. The Lies of the Devil
- III. We Must Leave a Legacy
 - A. We Need to Look Up
 - B. We Need to Confess Up
 - C. We Need to Stand Up

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and turn to Psalm 78—Psalm 78. And, as last Sunday, this Sunday we’re taking a respite from the Book of Romans. We will rejoin that book, God willing, next Sunday, but because this is the Fourth of July week, we are talking today about America. And, I want to say that the great American dream was placed in the heart of our Founding Fathers, I believe, by Almighty God. No nation—no nation—ever had such a Christian beginning as America. I say that is the American dream, but it is becoming not a dream, but a nightmare.

And, the nation that we once knew is receding over the horizon. We have those who purport to lead us now who are such poor examples. Someone has wisely said, you know, when little men cast long shadows, the sun is about to set. I’m afraid that we’re there. And, the nation that was born in Philadelphia in 1776 needs to be born again. Well, you say, “Pastor, America is still number one.” You’re right. We’re number one in homosexuality, number one in militant feminism, number one in divorce, number one in the destruction of family values, number one in abortion, number one in political correctness, number one in the occult and the New Age religion. And, I wonder, if Jesus

tarries, if some historian will not write *The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*.

Now, let me tell you what really concerns me more than anything else—and it is our children and our grandchildren—our children and our grandchildren. I want to talk to you today on this subject: “The Generation to Come”—“The Generation to Come.” And, there are three words that I want written upon your heart, and I hope that God will cause these to be written upon your consciousness today. One is the word *history*. The other is the word *memory*. And, the third is the word *legacy*. Now, I hope you’ll remember those three words as we go along.

Let’s look here in Psalm 78, verses 1 through 6: “*Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:*”—that is, mysterious things that can only be understood by the revelation of Almighty God—“*which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he hath established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children*” (Psalm 78:1–6).

Some time ago in a political campaign the slogan was this: “It’s the economy, stupid.” That is, if you want to get a vote from Americans, don’t worry about morality, don’t worry about righteousness, don’t worry about homes, don’t think about God, churches; think about one thing: the economy. “It’s the economy, stupid.” Well, very frankly, friend, that whole line of thought is stupid. It is not the economy. I don’t know what you want for your children, but I do not want for my children and grandchildren a nation that is wealthy and morally bankrupt. I do not want for my children—a nation of children, grandchildren—to have wealth, if they do have it, to squander in perversion and filth and immorality. I want a nation that we can thank God for, “one nation under God.”

I want to talk to you, therefore, about the generation to come. I want to tell you how to keep the great American dream alive. And, those three words, I want you to write them down again on your heart or in your notes. That word *history*, that word *memory*, and that word *legacy*. Or, if you want a better word, or a different word, *destiny*, because those are the words I want you to write on your heart as well as in your notes.

How are we going to keep the American dream alive?

I. We Must Preserve Our History

Number one: We must preserve our history. Now, notice what he said here in this verse. The Bible says, concerning our history—verse 4: “*We will not hide them from their*

children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength,”—now, watch this—“and the wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children” (Psalm 78:4–6).

Do you know what one of the major responsibilities of fathers and grandfathers is? It is to teach history. Now, very little of that is done, but you see, there is to be, according to the Word of God, a spiritual chain between the past and the future. And, the fathers and the grandfathers are to be links in that chain, because if we do not know our roots, if we do not remember what God made us to be, if we don't understand what God has done for us, if we don't teach this to our children, the generation to come, we as Americans are just one generation away from paganism; that's all there is.

Now, sometimes a man will say, “Well, I don't want to force my views upon my children. I just want them to be free to choose their own standard, to choose their own morality, to choose their own philosophy, and I want to give them that freedom of choice.” Well, while you're giving them that freedom of choice, I want to tell you there are plenty of forces out there who are working on their plastic mentality to mold your children into their image.

There are humanists. Now, we don't hear a lot about secular humanism anymore today, but secular humanism is alive and well in America, and these have an insidious plan to take your children, to remake them and remold them, and to cut them off from American history as we knew it. The humanists have a magazine. That magazine is called *The Humanist*. And, about a decade ago there was an article called “A Religion for a New Age.” And, I remind you that secular humanism is a religion, only they disguise it, and therefore they make the secular classrooms the Sunday School for their new religion, only it doesn't meet on Sunday; it meets Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. And, here's what this leading humanist said—and I quote: “The battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith... The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new—the rotting corpse of Christianity...and the faith of humanism.” Now, that's a frightening thought, but these are saying, “We're not going to allow Christian values in the schools today if we can help it, but we are going to bury the rotting corpse of Christianity, and there will be a new faith that is secular humanism.”

The Bible teaches that Almighty God holds parents responsible to teach their heritage and their history, and it is to go from father to son to grandson and great-grandson. There is to be a spiritual chain reaction. And, what is the history that we can

teach as Americans? Now, here the Psalmist is talking about the history of Israel. But, what history do we have in the United States of America? Now, the revisionists are trying to change our history. But, what is our history?

I said in the introduction to this message that the American dream was placed in the hearts of our Founding Fathers by Almighty God. And, the original colonies—listen to me—the original colonies were founded—and, I say this without stutter, stammer, or equivocation, or fear of contradiction—the original colonies were founded because of the Christian faith. And, those who came over here on the Mayflower, the Pilgrims, they huddled beneath the decks of that little Mayflower ship and they wrote a statement called The Mayflower Compact. And do you know how it began? And, by the way, if you can go to the Capitol, in the rotunda there you'll see a picture of this, a huge painting there in the rotunda of the Capitol. This Mayflower Compact began with these words: "In the name of God, Amen." That's the way they began. And, they stated why they were coming to these shores. And, I'm going to give you an exact quote—quote: "For the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith"—"For the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith."

On July the 4th, 1776, in the city of Philadelphia, our forefathers drafted a statement, a document called the Declaration of Independence. Now, that Declaration of Independence—and listen to me very carefully—was a declaration of independence from earthly tyranny, from those despots who would rule over those colonies, but in the same document—listen carefully—it was not only a declaration of independence from despots, but it was so clearly a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. Now, I want to show you that. I want you to listen. They said in the opening statement, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their"—what's the next word?—"Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Now, they believed in the Creator. They didn't say that government is going to give these rights; they didn't say that these rights were self-generated: that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. And then, in the closing words of that Declaration of Independence and dependence upon Almighty God, here's what they said. Now, listen to it carefully. They said, "[We do this] with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence"—[We do this] with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." We say, "Almighty God, we are looking upon You and Your goodness." And then, it says, "We mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

You see, folks, they said that they believed that the sovereign God is the Creator of mankind, that the rights that we enjoy as Americans have been given to us by Almighty God: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our government cannot give them; our government is here only to protect them. And then, they said we're going to sign away our lives, our fortunes, our sacred honor.

Many of our children do not know the price that has been paid that we might be here this morning. Of the 56 men who signed that Declaration of Independence, few were long to survive. Fifty-five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes sacked and looted, occupied by the enemy or burned. Two lost their sons in the army. Two had sons that were captured. Nine of the 56 died in the war from its hardships or from its more merciful bullets. These were not poor men. These were not wild-eyed fanatics. These were men who had ensconced themselves, most of them, in comfort, but were willing to forgo that comfort, forgo that reputation, so that you and I, freeborn Americans, might be here today. They did pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Now, we have to remember our history, folks. The word we're talking about now is history. We must proclaim our history. Let just think a little bit about America's history, lest we forget. In 1778, James Madison, who was the architect of the federal Constitution and the fourth president of the United States, said this: "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...[and] to sustain ourselves"—are you ready for this?—"according to the Ten Commandments of God." That's what the architect of the Constitution said. He said we've placed everything on the ability and the responsibility of Americans to govern themselves according to the Ten Commandments of God. And now, we cannot even post those Ten Commandments in our public school classrooms.

On April the 30th, 1789, George Washington said at his first inaugural address—listen: "My fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe..."—he's talking about God,—“that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.” That's the father of our country, George Washington. And then, he went on to say, "We ought to be no less persuaded that the...smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained."

In 1820, another of our forefathers, Daniel Webster, said this—this is back in 1820: "Let us not forget the religious character of our origin." Now, there are some who will say, "Rogers doesn't know what he's talking about." And, perhaps some school teacher will key in on this and get some of your students and say, "You know, these folks are trying to rewrite American history," talking about people like us. No, folks, they're the ones trying to rewrite American history. Listen to me. In 1820, Daniel Webster said, "Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by

their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...”—listen—“...and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.” That is, they wanted our Judeo-Christian ethic to go through all of life.

So therefore, on July the 4th, 1821, John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” Now, Americans believe in the separation of church and state, if you mean that there should not be a state-church. But, Americans never have believed for one scintilla of a moment in the separation of God and government: “one indissoluble bond.” He went on to say, “From the day of the Declaration...they”—the American people—“were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.” And on June the 8th, 1845, Andrew Jackson said the Bible is “the rock upon which our Republic rests.” That’s in 1845. And, Americans didn’t quibble about this. Therefore, in 1931, in March, the United States Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. Think about the fourth stanza of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” It says this:

*Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: “In God is our trust.”*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

Congress said as far back as 1931 that is to be our national anthem.

And then, in June 1954, Congress adopted the phrase “under God” to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance, and so we stand and pledge to our flag, “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” I wonder what the ACLU would have done, had they been active back in that time. And, in 1956, by joint resolution, Congress adopted a bill providing that the national motto of the United States is, “In God we trust.”

Now, you see that, I say, in “The Star-Spangled Banner,” our national anthem. Listen to it:

*Blest with vict’ry and peace, may the Heav’n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation!*

—Francis Scott Key

And then, our national hymn—what is our national hymn? “America”:

*Our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,*

*With freedom's holy light,
Great God our King.*

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Now, our kids are not hearing this. Are you going to wait for the schoolteachers to teach them this? According to this verse here in Psalm 78, God depended upon the fathers and the grandfathers to teach the spiritual history of Israel to their children. Should we not teach to our children, therefore, the spiritual history of America?

Now, fathers, how are you going to do this? You say, "Pastor, really I know very little of the spiritual history of America." Well, we have a bookstore over here. I suggest that you pay a visit to Bellevue's bookstore and get some materials that will help you to teach this spiritual history. And, by the way, not only should you teach to your children the history of America, but you need to teach to them the history of your church. How many of your children know the history of Bellevue Baptist Church? How many know the price that was paid that we might be here today, things that have happened since 1903, and the blood, the sweat, the tears, the sacrifice, the crises, the things that we have enjoyed as a church. Many of us come, plopp ourselves down, open a hymnal, and sing, and give no thought whatsoever to the history of this church. Not only do we need to know the history of our nation and the history of our church: Did you know every family ought to have a history written down? Why don't you teach the spiritual heritage of your family? It would be a great exercise for you to get all of your children and sit them down and say, "Children, here's what God has done for our family. Here is from whence we have come," and get each child to write down his or her testimony, mothers and fathers and dads, as to when they received Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. What a book of remembrance that would be for children to have! What the devil wants to do is to disconnect this generation and set them awash in the sea without any spiritual heritage. And, God says we need to remember the generation to come. We need to proclaim our history. Satan wants you to have spiritual amnesia.

II. We Must Retain Our Memory

Now, here's the second thing: Not only do we need to proclaim our history; we need to retain our memory. Look, if you will now, beginning in verse 7. He says you do this *"that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God..."*—now, you've got to give the history so they can have it, but then they're not to forget it—*"and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgat his works, and his wonders that he had shewed*

them” (Psalm 78:7–11).

So, not only do we need to proclaim our history; we need to retain our memory. And, God is saying, “Don’t forget the blessings of God.” How easy it is for us to forget the blessings of God! God warned Israel, in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and verse 12, “*Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage*” (Deuteronomy 6:12). And, he uses an illustration here about Ephraim. Ephraim was the dominant tribe, Ephraim was a strong tribe, and yet, according to this passage of Scripture, Ephraim was defeated in the day of battle because of a poor memory; not because they did not have numbers, not because they did not have armaments, but because they forgot God. They had excellent military equipment. America, strong as she is, like Ephraim, can be destroyed if we forget Almighty God.

You know, there are those who want us to forget. There are those who are rewriting American history. And, when we get cut off from our roots, then the fruit that we have been enjoying will wither and rot. Now, according to this scripture there are three memory-killers that Satan uses. And, I want you to see what those three memory-killers are. And, it’s a long Psalm, so fast-forward to verse 17, if you will. And, here is what they did that destroyed their memory. We’re going to read verses 17 through 20: “*And they sinned yet more and more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat*”—or food—“*for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wrath*” (Psalm 78:17–20).

What are the three memory-killers?

A. The Lust of the Flesh

Well, let’s just start with this first one. And, it is the lust of the flesh—the lust of the flesh. Americans are suffering from an erosion of moral values. My heart is sick as I see sexual perversion being paraded, homosexuality and heterosexual immorality being paraded. My heart is sick as I see the casual disposal of unwanted, unborn children. They call something a *partial-birth abortion*. That’s not a partial-birth abortion; that is murder during delivery; that’s what that is. But we as a nation—we as a nation—sit here on Sunday morning, benign, and hardly can think about it: the breakup of the family, the consuming obsession of self and material acquisitions, where a person would say, “It is the economy, stupid,” the craving of pleasure, drugs, and sex.

B. The Lure of the World

One thing that causes us to forget is the lust of the flesh. The other is the lure of the

world. Look, beginning now in verse 40, if you will: *“How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!”* That is, the children of Israel provoked God. *“Yea, they turned back and tempted God,”*—now, watch verse 41—*“and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered him from the enemy”* (Psalm 78:40–41).

Now, notice it says here they *limited* the Holy One of Israel. Do you know what the word *limited* literally means? It means they proscribed, or they put a circle, a horizon, around God; they limited God. They said, “Now, God, you stay in that circle; don’t get out of that circle. There are certain areas, God, where You are off limits; You are out of bounds.” They made no room for God in every area of their life.

Does that remind you of anything about America today? Friend, there’s no room for prayer, there’s no room for the Bible, there’s no room for the Ten Commandments in our classrooms, and yet our law says every child shall attend, unless you pay for your own private education; then Big Brother still wants to watch over. Every child shall attend, by law. And then, they say, “Well, we’re going to be neutral about it. We’re not going to be for God. We’re not going to be against God. We’re going to be neutral.” That gives me a pain I can’t locate. Do you know what that’s like? It is like saying, “We’re going to be neutral about food, so since we’re neutral about food, nobody will eat.” That’s the same thing: “We’re just neutral about food. We’re not for food; we’re not against food; so therefore, nobody will eat food.” You see, they just simply drew a circle around God. Not only was there the lust of the flesh, but there was the lure of the world.

What we have in America’s schools today, well, prayer is out; policemen are in. Bibles are out; values clarification is in. The Ten Commandments are out; but rape and armed robbery, gang warfare, murder and cheating, are in. Creation instruction is out; evolution is in. Corporal punishment is out; disrespect and rebellion are in. Traditional values are out; unwed motherhood is in. Abstinence is out; condoms are in. Learning is out; social engineering is in. History is out; revisionism is in.

C. The Lies of the Devil

There is the lust of the flesh that causes us to forget. There is the lure of the world. And then, there are the lies of the devil. Look, if you will, down in verse 58. Here’s the third memory-breaker: *“They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images”* (Psalm 78:58). Not only did they shut God in, but they turned to pagan gods: the lies of the devil.

Peter Jones has written a book called *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*. In that book he asked a pertinent question, and I want to ask you the question as he asked it in the book. Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions? Why is homosexuality on the rise? Why is it endorsed by Time Magazine, promoted on publicly

funded radio, and featured in children's comic strips with great moral fervor and in the name of democracy? Why is feminism such a powerful force today? Why is this movement developing its own goddess spirituality? Why is witchcraft taught in certain California school districts? Why is feminist spirituality making enormous inroads into Christianity? Why is abortion a vitally important part of the feminist manifesto? Is ecology just a neutral concern about the survival of the planet, or does it too have a religious agenda? Why is America's Indian nature religion being actively promoted? Why is the work ethic no longer working? Why is multiculturalism and political correctness so important on many college campuses? Are these seemingly disconnected issues related in any way to the so-called New Age Movement? Why are the numerous New Age spiritual techniques for healing, peace of mind, and self-knowledge being publicized so vigorously in the media, and more and more utilized in the business world and the armed forces? The real question is this: Are these apparently disconnected issues really a part of a coherent pagan ideology poised to impose its religious belief system on the New World Order...of the twenty-first century?"

Think about it. Friend, something is moving in America today. And, these three things have caused us to forget, as they caused Israel to forget: the lust of the flesh, the lure of the world, and the lies of the devil. Now, there's a generation to come, and according to this passage of Scripture, it is the father's responsibility to teach his children and his grandchildren spiritual history.

III. We Must Leave a Legacy

Now, here's the third thing, the final thing. The first word I wanted you to think about was the word *history*. The second word is the word *memory*—lest we forget. The third word is the word *legacy* or *destiny*. Look, if you will now, in verses 59 and following in this same chapter. He says, "*When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel.*" You know, folks, Israel was His chosen nation, and yet God was angry with them, and God abhorred them. I'm not afraid of what the Red Chinese will do to us. I'm not afraid of what Saddam Hussein may do. I'm not afraid of what Indian Pakistan may do with the bomb. I'm afraid of what Almighty God is going to do. And, God is our only hope, and God is our biggest threat. Look at this: "*When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand*" (Psalm 78:59–61).

What does that mean? It means that the great nation of Israel was taken into captivity. What does that mean for America? We sang this morning—and I love to hear you sing it—"God Bless America," but are we asking God to bless sin? Are we asking God to bless indolence? Are we asking God to bless greed? Are we asking God to

bless perversion? Are we asking God to bless blasphemy? America, this nation, may become a moldy crust in history's garbage can unless we have a moral and a spiritual awakening. I ask you again the question: the generation to come, what kind of a nation are we going to leave? I look at my grandchildren. I look at Renae, I look at Angela, I look at Rachel, I look at Jonathan, I look at Stephen; I think of these my grandchildren. I say, "Oh, God, oh, God, what's going to happen to little Rachel? What kind of a world will she grow up in? What kind of a land will our children know?" I want them to have the blessings that we've had. Don't you? The generation to come. And, folks, it's time we got serious.

A woman was traveling in Europe, and she saw a piece of jewelry that was very expensive, and she really wanted it. Her husband was at home. She wired him back and described the jewelry, and she said to her husband, "Do you think I ought to buy it?" She was hoping that he would say yes. But, he wrote back and said, "No, price too high." She read that, and here's the way she read it: "no price too high"—"no price too high"—and she bought it.

Now, folks, I want to tell you something. There is no price too high for us to pay for this nation; no price too high for us to say it, sing it, and mean it: God bless America.

Now, what do we need to do?

A. We Need to Look Up

Well, we need to look up. God's the only one big enough and strong enough to save us, but He is big enough and strong enough. I want to tell you this. Listen. God had rather forgive than judge. God wants to forgive us.

B. We Need to Confess Up

We need to look up, and we need to confess up. God will not bless sin. And, we can't use our prayers as a smokescreen to hide sin. We need to get right with God.

C. We Need to Stand Up

And then, we need to stand up. Do you know what the world is trying to do? They're trying to get us in our little stained-glass prisons, and they say, "Now, now, don't you go out of doors. It's all right for you to huddle together and to have your holy huddles, but don't get into the public life; don't get into the public arena; don't get a candidate; don't speak up; don't call sin sin. Go back under the rock." We need to come from out under the rock and stand on the rock and say some things today. We need to stand up, and we need to speak up. We need to understand what the issues are, and we need to speak up while we still have time. You say, "Well, we're not as many as we used to be." Well, I want to remind you that Lenin began the Communist revolution with a few hundred. I want to remind you that Castro took Cuba with a band of 80 cutthroats. I

want to remind you that Jesus, on the positive side, started with 12 disciples. The Bible says that five of us can chase a hundred (Leviticus 26:8). *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31).

Conclusion

I want to say one other thing, and listen to me carefully. I really don't know what God is going to do with America. I really don't know whether the republic that was born in 1776 will survive. I really don't know, because I cannot control the hearts and minds of other people, but one thing I know that I know: that Jesus is King of the universe, and He's King of the ages; and one thing I know that I know: I'm going to give my heart to Jesus Christ, and I'm going to teach my children and my grandchildren, the generation to come, that no matter what happens, if they will know and love Jesus ultimately, it will be all right.

The Generation to Come and the America of Tomorrow

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 2, 2000

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 78

“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”

PSALMS 78:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. We Need to Review our History
- II. We Need to Renew Our Memory
 - A. The Lust of the Flesh
 - B. The Lure of the World
 - C. The Lies of the Devil
- III. We Must Reclaim our Legacy

Conclusion

Introduction

Find Psalm 78. Now, if you're new in the faith, the Book of Psalms is the middle book in the Bible, and then it's just a matter of counting, you'll come right over to Psalms 78. I am concerned not only about the America of today, but I am concerned about the America of tomorrow. I am concerned about the generation to come. And, what we're talking about today is “The Generation to Come and the America of Tomorrow.” What will America will be like ten, fifteen, twenty years from now if the Almighty carries? You know, we've been reminded that today America is number one, but unfortunately, we're number one in homosexuality, radical feminism, divorce, abortion, political correctness, and the destruction of family values. You say, “Yes, but we're also economically number one.” I, for one, had rather leave to our children a legacy of great and godly principles than to leave to them a nation of great wealth to be squandered in a godless society.

Now, here's what God's Word says—Psalm 78: *“Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:”—*that is, truths from yesterday that your fathers have known—*“which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them*

from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children” (Psalm 78:1–6).

Now, we’ve seen some things happen today in our generation. We’ve seen the implosion of Soviet communism. We’ve seen the iron curtain come down. We’ve seen communism become a relic of the past in most places. But, I want to ask you a question. Do you feel more secure today than you did then? Very frankly, I don’t, because when we’ve gotten rid of the demon of communism, seven more deadly demons have come to America. We are in great danger.

Now, the American dream, I am convinced, was placed into the bosom of our Founding Fathers by Almighty God. America did not just happen. America was the gift of Almighty God. But, that American dream is about to become a nightmare. I am wondering about the America of tomorrow. I am wondering about the generation to come. I am thinking not only about my children, but I’m at the age now I’m thinking about my grandchildren and my children’s children. What legacy are we going to leave? What is the America of tomorrow? I want to lay three thoughts on your heart this morning from this seventy-eighth Psalm, and I hope you’ll keep the Bible open in your lap and see that these thoughts will come from the Word of God.

Now, God had blessed the nation Israel, and God had delivered them from the gnawing and tormenting chains of slavery, and God had brought them into a good land. And, God gave them a law, God gave them a land, God gave them a Lord. But, what they did was to defile the land, deny the Lord, disobey the law, and judgment came to them. Now, Asaph, the Psalmist, is giving some instruction to a nation like this, and I’m telling you there is a great parallel, and there is ancient truth for today’s world. Three things I want to lay on your heart.

I. We Need to Review our History

Number one: we need to review our history—we need to review our history. Look, if you will, in verses 4 through 6: *“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done”*—that is, we need to show our children what God has done. *“For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them”* (Psalm 78:4–6). What’s He saying? “Israel, look back. See what God has done. Review your history.”

Now, this passage of Scripture says a word to all you dads. How many dads here? Lift your hands, fathers. All right, here's your assignment from Almighty God. You, sir, are to be a teacher of history. You have been appointed by God to be a teacher of history.

A little boy came home from school and he looked sad. The father said, "Son, what's wrong?" He said, "I'm afraid I failed my history test." The dad said, "No." He said, "You're thinking negatively. Be more positive." He said, "Okay. I am positive I failed my history test."

Now, I don't want you dads to be positive failures. You are to teach history. Spiritually, it is vitally important. Listen to me. It is vitally important that we know our roots. If we don't teach the generation to come, then we've been cut off from our roots. Have you ever thought about the fact that we're only one generation away from paganism? That's all. Just one generation. If we miss a generation, then we're gone. I hear parents say, "Well, I'm not going to force my views upon my children. I'm going to let my children make up their own mind. I'm going to let them decide for themselves." Frankly, you've got room to rent upstairs unfurnished. No! You need to put something in your children's mind. Listen to me. The world is going to teach them, their teachers are going to teach them, their companions are going to teach them, the media is going to teach them, *MTV* is going to teach them, and you're going to say, "I'm just going to sit around and let them make up their mind"?

The humanist educators have your children, the generation to come, in their mind. Let me quote from one of them. And, by the way, lest you think this is some yo-yo from off the wall, this man that I'm going to quote is a professor in Educational Psychiatry at Harvard University. Now, here's what he said: "Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill." That ought to cause you just to get a whiff of coffee right there. Listen to it: "Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our Founding Fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being, toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity." That, friend, is mental illness. Now, again, this is a professor at Harvard speaking. And then, here's what he said—and listen to it. This is a direct quote: "It is up to you teachers..."—now, he's talking to educators now—"It's up to you teachers to make all these sick children well—by creating the international child of the future." And, you say, "Well, I'm not going to influence my children. I'm just going to let them make up their own mind." There is a systematic seduction of children today.

Here's what the humanist educators are planning for your children—and the quotation I'm going to give you now is coming from *The Humanist* magazine. "A Religion for a New Age," January/February 1983, page 26—listen to it: "The battle for

humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith." That is, the public schools, according to humanists, have become the Sunday school classes for the children of tomorrow, "the proselytizers of a new faith." And, then, listen to this quote: "The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new—the rotting corpse of Christianity...and the new faith of humanism." The old: the rotting corpse of Christianity; the new: the faith of humanism.

Now, *humanism* sounds so good because it sounds so much like *humanitarian*, doesn't it? Well, the name has been disguised to protect the guilty. The truth is, sir, fathers, God holds you responsible to be a teacher of history, and our faith is to go from father to son to grandson. That's exactly what the Word of God says again. Listen. Look in verse 5: "*For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children*" (Psalm 78:5–6).

We are passing off the baton. There is a legacy that is to be left. It is to go from father to son to grandson, and on and on and on in a spiritual chain reaction.

A child came in and said, "Mother, you remember that vase that we used to have, the one that was handed down from generation to generation? Well, this generation just dropped it." And, I'm afraid that we have a generation that is in danger of dropping the faith that has gone from generation from generation. Fathers are to teach spiritual and national history.

What is the history of America? The revisionists have tried to take it away from us. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. And, remember, it was a declaration of independence from earthly powers, despotic powers, but it was also a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. Now, the ACLU, the humanists, and the anti-God-ists, they don't want us to recognize that. Remember how that declaration began: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men...are endowed by their Creator..."—"by their Creator": they believed in creation. You can't even teach creation in public schools today—"endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Right off to begin with, we want our Constitution to be written in the light of this declaration. And, notice how the Declaration of Independence closes. Sometimes we don't get to the close of it, but it says, "With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence,"—what is "divine Providence"? That's just a synonym for Almighty God—"we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." It was a declaration of independence from Great Britain; it was a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God.

Now, in 1778, James Madison, who is the architect of our federal Constitution, the

fourth President, said this—and we’ve heard this quotation many times. I want to give it to you again: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.” That’s the architect of the Constitution that said that. Now you can’t even post the Ten Commandments on classroom walls.

On April the 30th, George Washington, in his inaugural address, said this: “My fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction”—that means His blessing—“may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.” What he’s saying is, “Look, we can’t do it without God.” And then, he went on to say, “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smile of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.” George Washington said, “Without God, it won’t be done.” Yes, you’re right, Jamie. We need God in America again—we need God in America again.

In December 1820, Daniel Webster said—and I quote, “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles...and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.” They never thought of saying that we don’t want God in our government, we don’t want God in our education—not according to Daniel Webster.

On July 4, 1821, John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principle of Christianity.” Now, the revisionists of history don’t want you to hear that. Our children are not being taught that in the public school. Dads, you are to be teachers of history.

On July 8, 1845, President Andrew Jackson said the Bible is “the rock upon which our Republic rests.” That’s what he said. And, early Americans knew this. March 1931, the United States Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. You know what the fourth stanza says:

*Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto:*

—you finish it—

“In God is our trust.”

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

That, friend, is our national anthem. If we tried that today, the ACLU would have a spasm—they'd have a spasm.

In 1952, the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, said, "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." That is built in. "We hold these truths to be self-evident." Therefore, in June 1954, Congress adopted the phrase, "under God," to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance: "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." And then, in July 1956, by joint resolution, Congress adopted the bill providing that the national motto of the United States is "In God we trust."

You can see this spiritual heritage that we have in our national hymn. The anthem says,

*Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

And, the national hymn:

*Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

—listen to this—

Great God our King.

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Never say America doesn't have a king. We have a President we can vote in and out, but we have a King we can't vote in and can't vote out. We can deny Him and turn our back on Him if we are foolish enough to do this.

Our fathers rightly believed, rightly understood, in the separation of church and state. That is, they have no national denomination, but they never believed in the separation of God and government—to the contrary.

Now, I'm saying this: that how many of our children today know the things that I've just given? Many of them are abysmally ignorant of these things. And so, fathers, according to this Psalm, you are to teach those things to your children. You say, "I don't know how to teach them." Go to our library. Go to our bookstore. There's plenty of

material there. And, if you need to take time, turn off that television. Kids are watching television. They've gone to the computer. You're still watching the television, and your eyes are getting as big as coconuts and your brain the size of a pea. Go to the bookstore and learn some things about our history.

Listen. Not only do we need to teach America's spiritual history; every family needs to write down its own spiritual history. Let me give you a project for families today. Write your family history, your spiritual history. Get the members of that family to write their testimony, and put them in a book. When I was preparing this message, I thought to myself, "I've not done that." And, I'm going to take that for a project to do. I'm going to write my testimony, put it in a book, have Joyce to write hers, to have my children write their testimony, my in-laws to write their testimony, and my children, my grandchildren—all of them to write it, and put it in a book, and look back and see what God has done for our families. What a blessing it would be to have our own family history so we could teach that!

You know Bruce Wilkinson imagines a family reunion. And, let's say that the mother and the father are celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. So, those who've been married for 50 years are there, and they're in the place of honor, and the children and the grandchildren are there to honor these who've been married for 50 years. And, those who have been married for 50 years, if they still are married, they love one another more devotedly now than they did when they got married, and so they're laughing and teasing and flirting with one another. Now, the next generation is there, the children of these, and that next generation is between 40 and 50. Some of them are what we call the *boomers*. They're facing now their fiftieth year, and they're joking about it a little bit. And, their children are there. These are those who are teens and early 20s. They're there at this family reunion. When those who are celebrating their golden wedding anniversary, their fiftieth wedding anniversary were born, there were no televisions at all. Few people, if any, traveled on an airplane. Not all of them had automobiles. And, many of them never thought about taking some of the trips that people will take today. About the only way they got their information was the newspapers, the library, and an occasional book.

Now, your generation, the *boomers* now, there were some changes that came along. Now, you were not raised with the shopping malls. You were not raised with the computer. You were not raised with cell phones. However, the television came along. However, college degrees came along. However, the space race did come along, and it gave you a sense of euphoria, that we are entering into a bold new era. But, what did you watch on television? You watched *I Love Lucy*, *Father Knows Best*, and these kinds of things. What were your little goodies, the things that you enjoyed as a child? A transistor radio. Well, if you just had a transistor radio, you were something. But now,

what about your kids? What do they watch? They watch *MTV*. They watch *NYPD Blue*. They watch *HBO*, “Hell’s Box Office,” where nudity, profanity, vanity comes piped right into the living room. Your children, they sit around and talk with total strangers on computers about all kinds of subjects. They have been immersed in rock and roll. They have been “sexually liberated.” There’s a drug culture and a weak commitment to Jesus Christ. God is laughed at and mocked and called out of bounds for this generation.

Now, I want to ask you a question. What about the generation to come? What about their children? What is happening in America? I’m not against progress, but much that we call progress is not progress. I’m saying that we need to study the history of our nation. I’m saying you need to remember the history of your family. I am saying, ladies and gentlemen, also that we need to remember our church history. Bellevue Baptist Church is a wonderful church. Thank God for it. Soon we’re going to celebrate 100 years in the year 2003. Thank God for this church. Do you know what makes Bellevue Baptist Church the church that it is? Bellevue, from its inception, has known that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, that Jesus Christ, and Jesus only, is the Lord of His Church, and that we need to preach the old-fashioned gospel: Hell hot, Heaven sweet, sin black, judgment sure, and Jesus saves. And, this church has been built on that.

But I’m amazed sometimes at what can happen to some Bible-believing churches, Brother Whitmire, that somehow just began to get more program-oriented. They began to get more oriented in methods. And, they begin to get more oriented in the people in the pew rather than the Word of God in the pulpit, and they get away—they get away. And, the first thing they know, they will call some good-speaking, personable man to be the pastor, who does not believe the faith that the church was founded on. And, once great churches and denominations are taken away, churches need to remember their history. Churches need to remember their roots, because, friend, if you get away from the roots, before long the fruit will wither and die. We’re to teach the generation to come.

I’ll tell you something else. Individuals need to study their history. They need to understand what God has done. When your little children come to Jesus Christ—and they ought to; don’t think that a child has to have a Ph.D. in sin before he or she can get saved. It’s normal, it’s natural, for little children to come to Christ when they’re raised in a Christian home. Now, when they come to Christ, however, help them to understand their history. Write it down. Rejoice over it. And, every year not only let them have a natural birthday, but a supernatural birthday: “Honey, this was the day when you got saved. Let’s talk it down. Let’s thank God.” Write it in a book. Let that child remember that he has a history. The devil wants to get us away from our heritage.

And so, I’m saying the first point, which is certainly going to be longer than the next

two, but the first point, is we need to review our history. That's what he's saying. Look at it again. The Bible says, *"We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done"* (Psalm 78:4).

II. We Need to Renew Our Memory

Number two: Not only do we need to review our history, but, my brothers and sisters, we need to renew our memory. It is so easy to forget. Now, begin reading in verse 7. Why do we do this? Look, if you will, in verse 7: *"That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; and forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them"* (Psalm 78:7–11).

Now, here God is saying, "Don't forget." Review your history. Renew your memory—renew your memory. Don't forget how easy it is to forget the blessings of Almighty God. The Bible says here that, *"The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle"* (Psalm 78:9). Now, Ephraim was the dominant tribe. It may have been the strongest, the most numerous, but they were defeated. They had excellent military equipment. They were carrying bows, but they were defeated. Why? They forgot. And, America today is suffering from spiritual amnesia. We have failed in history. We have those today who want to rewrite our history.

There are three memory-killers. Ephraim suffered from all three, and America is suffering from all three.

A. The Lust of the Flesh

First of all, the lust of the flesh. Fast-forward to verse 17 in this Psalm and look at it: *"And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness"* Do you know America is provoking God? America is sticking its finger in the eye of God. *"And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?"* (Psalm 78:18–20).

Now, rather than thanking God for His blessings, they're mourning more and more—the lust of the flesh. America is suffering today from an erosion of spiritual virtues and values: sexual permissiveness, the blatant parading of perversion, the continual and casual disposal of the unborn and unwanted, the breakup of the family, the obsession

with self and pleasure and drugs and sex. America is rolling in luxuries, but we're reveling in excesses, reeling in drunkenness, rotting in morals and in sins.

B. The Lure of the World

Now, there was the lust of the flesh that caused Ephraim to forget. Number two: There was the lure of the world. Look in verses 40 through 42: *"How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert..."*—not only do we break God's law by provoking Him; we break God's heart by forgiving Him—"grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy" (Psalm 78:40–42). How quickly we forget. *"They remembered not"*: we need to renew our memory.

Now, this verse says they *"limited the Holy God of Israel"* (Psalm 78:41). Now, wait a minute. God is God. How can anyone put a governor on God? How can anyone limit God? This word—*"they limited"*—is the word we get our word *horizon* from. They horizoned God. Now, if you go to a high place and look around, you'll see a circle, and a circle is the horizon. And, what they have said to God, "Now, this is Your limit. You stay in here. Don't get beyond the horizon. Don't get beyond what we can see." What we've done in America is we have horizoned God. We have limited God. We've made no room for God. We've said, "God, stay inside that circle." So, in our government, the Ten Commandments are out; sex education is in. In our government, chastity is out; birth control for teens is in. In our schools, the Ten Commandments are out, but metal detectors and policeman are in. We need to renew our memory.

C. The Lies of the Devil

Now, not only did they forget because of the lust of the flesh, and not only the lure of the world, but the lies of the devil. Look in verse 58: *"They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images"* (Psalm 78:58). They forget the one true God who founded them as a nation, and now they're worshipping false gods. Peter Jones has written a book. The title of the book is this: *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*. I want to give a quotation from that book: "Have you asked yourself any of the following questions? Why is homosexuality on the rise? Why is it endorsed by Time Magazine, promoted on publicly funded radio, and featured in children's comic strips with great moral fervor and in the name of democracy? Why is feminism such a powerful force today? Why is this movement developing its own goddess spirituality? Why is witchcraft taught in certain California school districts? Why is feminist spirituality making enormous inroads into Christianity? Why is abortion a vitally important part of the feminist manifesto? Is ecology just a neutral concern about the survival of the planets, or does it too have a religious agenda? Why is American

Indian nature religion being actively promoted? Why is the work ethic no longer working? Why is multiculturalism and political correctness so important on many college campuses? Are these seemingly dis-connected issues related in any way to the so-called New Age movement? Why are numerous New Age spiritual techniques for healing, peace of mind, and self-knowledge being publicized so vigorously in the media, and more and more utilized in the business world and the armed forces? The real question is this: Are these apparently disconnected issues really a part of a coherent pagan ideology poised to impose its religious belief system on the New World Order (the Age of Aquarius) of the twenty-first century?"

Now, we need to wake up. We need to review our history. We need to review our memory. My heart breaks that the Supreme Court of the United States of America says it is legal to take a little baby, almost completely born, just its head in the birth canal, a baby that could be viable, living, and for a medical doctor, who is supposed to preserve life, to take a surgical instrument and put that in the skull of that little baby just about to come from its mother's birth canal, collapse the head, and bring out a corpse rather than a baby. That is wrong—wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. It is wrong. I am convinced that much of what goes under the guise of abortion today is a blood sacrifice to the demon gods of lust and sex. That's what it is: a blood sacrifice to demon gods.

III. We Must Reclaim our Legacy

We need, ladies and gentlemen, to review our history. We need to renew our memory. And then, we must reclaim our legacy. We must reclaim our legacy. Look in verses 59 through 61, if you will, of this same chapter: *"When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel:"*—now, remember Israel, His chosen people—*"so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand."* America may become a molded crust in history's garbage can. *Not only is God our only hope; God is our biggest threat. And, the nation that was born in 1776 must be born again or we will join the graveyard of the nations .*

Conclusion

Now, ask ourselves this question: What about the generation to come? What about America of tomorrow? What will it be like if we fail to turn to God? What will it be like if this generation does not say, "Enough is enough?"

I read a story. It deeply moved me. Back in World War II there were some French who were taken captive by the Germans. The Germans took these French and made them work in a munitions factory building bombs. And, with their bombs they knew the bombs that they were building would be dropped on their own French brothers and

sisters, on their own soil. They were building bombs to drop on their own people. But, when the German *Luftwaffe* would fly over and drop those bombs, the bombs that were meant to explode on impact would just fall and not explode. Another bomb wouldn't explode. Another wouldn't explode. After a while, they said, "There can't be that many duds." And, some of the experts got one of these bombs and began to dismantle it to find out why they were not exploding. And, inside they found a note in every one of them. The French had built in a malfunction in these bombs, and here's what the note said: "We are doing the best we can with what we've got, where we are, every chance we get." I love it—I love it. Listen to it again. "We are doing the best we can with what we've got, where we are, every chance we get."

I want to tell you this, friend. I am only one man, but I want to do the best I can where I am, with what I have, with every chance I get. And, if we do that, we can change this city. I'll tell you, we can change this nation. There are enough Christians in America, if they will wake up and do right, if they will review their history, if they will renew their memory, they can reclaim their legacy.

How to Keep the American Dream Alive

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 4, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 78:1–6

“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”

PSALMS 78:4

Outline

Introduction

I. We Must Proclaim Our History

II. We Must Protect Our Memory

A. The Lust of the Flesh

B. The Lure of the World

C. The Lies of the Devil

III. We Must Preserve Our Legacy

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word, please, and find with me in the Holy Bible Psalm 78. We’re celebrating today our nation, and I want to say that I believe that the great American dream was placed into the heart and into the bosom of our founding fathers by God Himself. No other nation had such a Christian beginning as did the United States of America. That we call the great American dream, but I’m afraid that the great American dream is fast becoming a national nightmare, and something needs to be done. I want to speak to you today on this subject: “How to Keep the American Dream Alive”—“How to Keep the American Dream Alive.”

Read the first six verses in Psalm 78 with me: *“Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.”* Just underscore that phrase, *“our fathers have told us.”* *“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers,”*—underscore that: *“our*

fathers”—*“that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children”* (Psalm 78:1–6). The faith of our fathers needs to be handed down from generation to generation to generation. I wonder what kind of a nation my children will grow up under. I wonder what kind of a land will they live in.

You see, Peter Jones has pointed out that America is still number one, but we’re number one in homosexuality, number one in feminism, number one in divorce, number one in the destruction of family values, number one in abortion, number one in political correctness and the occult humanistic spirituality of New Age religion. Do you know what has happened to us? We have rejoiced in recent years that the demon of communism has been removed. But, think about it. Do you remember that story in the Bible about a man that had a demon and his house was cleansed of that demon and then seven other more deadly demons came in to take the place of that demon? Do you remember that story in the Bible? He got rid of one, but that’s all he did. He swept his house and cleaned it and garnished his house, but he put nothing or no one in to take the place of that demon that had been removed. We’ve gotten rid of the demon of communism to some degree, and seven more deadly demons are coming to America, because when we had an opportunity—and, thank God we still have that opportunity for revival—we have not taken the opportunity for spiritual revival.

Now, what we need to do today is to preserve our legacy, reclaim our liberty. Now, look, if you will, and find out what fathers are to do. Now, today the message is primarily to you dads. So dads give a listen and listen up. I’m going to tell you how to keep the American dream alive. And, the secret is not primarily in the church house. The secret is not in the White House. The secret is not in the schoolhouse. Believe it or not, dads, the secret is in your house, and it is incumbent upon you that in your house as a daddy you do what you’re supposed to do to keep the American dream alive.

I. We Must Proclaim Our History

Notice in verse 4: *“We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children”* (Psalm 78:4–5). The dad is to be the link in a spiritual chain reaction from the past through the present to the future. The dads are to be teachers, therefore, of history.

How many of you dads ever thought of yourself as a history teacher? I’m reminded of the boy who came to his dad and he said, “Dad, I think I flunked my history exam.” The dad said, “Now, don’t say that. Be positive.” He said, “Okay, I’m positive I flunked my history exam.”

Well, you dads need not only to chastise your sons for failing in history, but you yourself need to be a teacher of history. You know, it's very important as a nation that we remember our roots. There are those who are trying to cut us away from our roots and to keep us from remembering how this nation was born. Dad, you must give your children a history lesson.

Now, one of the most foolish things I've ever heard anyone say is this: "I'm not going to force my views upon my children. I'm going to wait until I get old enough, and when they're old enough, I'm going to let them make up their mind for themselves." May I say this to you—that if you don't force your views on your children and teach your children what you believe, there are plenty of other people who are going to force their views on them. The world is going to force its views on them. Their teachers are going to force their views on them. Their companions are going to force their views on them. And, the media and the rock culture is forcing its views on the minds of your children and taking advantage of their plastic mentality.

Let me tell you what the humanist educators have in mind about your child. I want you to listen to a quote, and this is not from someone from off the wall. This quote is from a childhood education seminar by a professor of education and psychiatry at Harvard University. Now, I want you to hear what he said: "Every child in America entering a school at the age of five is mentally ill." How's that for openness? Now again, this is a professor of educational psychiatry at Harvard. "Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill, because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our Founding Fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being, toward the sovereignty of his nation as a separate entity." That makes him mentally ill, you see. He comes to school mentally ill, because he believes in what? Because he believes in the Founding Fathers, the elected officials, a belief in God, and because he believes in America.

Now, I want to quote something else. Here's what the humanist educators are planning to do with your children, and I'm going to give you a direct quote: "The battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly proceed their role as the proselytizers of a new faith. The classroom must and will become the arena of conflict between the old and the new: the rotten core of Christianity and the faith of humanism." That quote was taken from "A Religion for a New Age," *The Humanist* magazine, January-February edition, 1983, page 26.

The truth of the matter is that there are plenty of people who want to get hold of your child's mind and distort it and pour into their mind, their plastic mentality that the children have—but their ideas. But, God says that children are the responsibility of their parents and especially the fathers. And, the faith that we hold and the legacy that we

love is to go from father to son to grandson to great grandson. There is to be a spiritual chain of action.

I heard of a little boy who came to his mother, and he said, “Mama, remember that beautiful vase that’s in the foyer, that vase that’s been handed down from generation to generation? Mama, remember that vase?” She said, “Yes.” The little fellow said, “This generation just dropped it.”

Well, friend, there’s a faith that has been handed down, a legacy that has been handed down from generation to generation to generation, and this generation had better not drop it. The Bible teaches that fathers are to be teachers of history, spiritual history. What is America’s spiritual history?

There are revisionists today who want to take away our history. There are Grinches that not only want to steal Christmas; they also want to steal the Fourth of July. Let me tell you a little bit about America’s history.

You know the day that we celebrate today, July the 4th, commemorates July 4th, 1776, when there was signed in Philadelphia a Declaration of Independence from Britain, which marked the birth date of our nation. But, never fail to remember this: our forefathers were not only declaring independence from Britain; they were declaring, and I’m going to show you in a moment, they were plainly declaring dependence on Almighty God. Now, get this in your mind. They were declaring independence from Britain, dependence on Almighty God, and don’t let the secularist, don’t let the humanist, don’t let the revisionist, don’t let the Grinch steal this away.

I’m going to prove beyond the shadow of any doubt that our Founding Fathers when they declared their independence from tyranny were at the same time and in the same breath declaring their dependence on Almighty God. For example, think of these words in that Declaration of Independence that we celebrate today: “We hold these truths to be self-evident,”—that is, “we don’t quibble about this”—“that all men are endowed by their”— what?—“Creator...”—you know you can’t teach creation at school today. I wonder how you can teach the Declaration of Independence—“all men are endowed by their Creator...”—they didn’t believe that we’re orphans of the apes—“by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” That’s the way they began, and that’s a certain, a wonderful, beginning. But, think about the closing. Listen to it: “A firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.” Did you hear that? “With a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” They said, “We depend upon God; we rely upon God.”

And, if you’ll think about that Declaration of Independence, it stands out, number one, that the sovereign God is man’s Creator—the sovereign God is man’s Creator; number two, it is the Creator that gives us our rights, not the government. The

government does not give rights; the government is here to protect God-given rights. You see, the government is not here to provide for the general welfare. The government is here to promote the general welfare, but to provide for the common defense. Our Founding Fathers knew the Bible enough and they were wise enough to know that the government was not a cow to be milked. It was a watchdog to be fed. That's what they said, that this entire Declaration, and later our Constitution, it was all written in the warp and woof of Bible truths. They went on to teach that civil governments, if just, are formed to protect rights, and that the sovereign God gives each man the right to govern himself.

We learned in "Celebrate America" of those 56 men that signed this Declaration. They paid the price with their life, with their fortune, and with their secret honor. Five were captured by the British and tortured before they died; twelve had their homes sacked and looted and burned, or occupied by the enemy; two gave their sons who died fighting; one had two sons captured; and nine of the 56 died in the war from its hardships or for its more merciful bullets. We've learned again that these men were not wild-eyed fanatics. They were not poor men. They were men of wealth and education and culture, but they pledged their lives, fortunes, sacred honor, that we might be in this place today doing what we're doing.

Now, listen to me very carefully. There are plenty of people who have the idea that this nation does not have a spiritual a godly and a spiritual heritage. If you believe that, I want you to play close attention. Dads, you're to be teachers of history. Now, I want you to get these facts, and I want to disabuse you of any idea that we do not have a Christian and a godly heritage. I'm going to give you some quotes, and I want you to listen. In 1778, James Madison, who was the architect of the Federal Constitution and the fourth President, said this—now, this is James Madison: "We have staked the whole future of American civilization not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." Now, did you know that you cannot even post those Ten Commandments on the classroom walls in America today? Madison said, "We've staked everything on this: that we're going to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." This was the architect of the Constitution.

On April the 30th, 1789, George Washington, who we say is the father of our country, at his first inaugural address, said this—and I quote: "My fervent supplication to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States, a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes." And then,

Washington went on to say, “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation”—listen—“that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which heaven itself has ordained.” Do you know what he said in modern parlance? “If we don’t continue to depend on God, we’re going to go down the tubes.” That’s what Washington said. He said it a lot better than that, though.

December 1820, Daniel Webster, the great statesman, said this—and I quote: “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin.” Now, he’s speaking to us. Let’s not forget it. “Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...and diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.”

Do you know what Webster said? Webster said our Founding Fathers expected this land to be infused with the Christian faith, and on July 4th, 1821, John Quincy Adams said—and listen to this: “The highest glory of the American Revolution is this; it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” Anybody who can take a Bible in one hand and the Constitution in the other hand can see what John Quincy Adams was talking about. He went on to say, “From the day of the Declaration...they”—and, he’s talking about the American people—“were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.” He’s saying, what we have is a Judeo-Christian ethic.

On June the 8th, 1845, President Andrew Jackson said this: “The Bible is the rock upon which our republic rests.” By the way, we have a republic, not a democracy. A republic is a rule by law. A democracy is a rule by the mob or the many. Thank God for the republic that we have that is based in constitutional law that has come out of the Word of God. In 1913, President Woodrow Wilson said, “America was born to exemplify the devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the Holy Scriptures.”

Now, I want to ask you a question. Were all of these men fools or fanatics? No, these are the people that we look back to as our Founding Fathers. No wonder in March 1931 the United States adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our anthem. And, I love the fourth stanza:

*Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And, this be our motto:*

—you finish—

“In God is our trust.”

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

And, in 1952, the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said, “We are a religious people and our institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” He’s just saying that’s the same thing they presuppose, that we hold all these truths to be self-evident. And, in June 1964, Congress adopted this phrase, “under God,” to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, and we stand and pledge allegiance: “one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.”

In July 1956, Congress, by a joint resolution of Congress, adopted a bill providing the national motto to be “In God We Trust.” All of these things are what our national hymn tells us:

*Our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom’s holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King.*

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

They’re saying, “King George, you’re not our King. God is our King.” That is what the American Revolution was all about.

Now, Americans believe, when it is rightly understood, in a separation of church and state; that is, there should be no national church. But, we did not believe for one skinny minute in the separation of government from God. Anybody who can read, anybody who can listen, anybody with an open heart and mind, can tell this.

Now, dads, do your children know this? Well, they’re not going to get it very much in school anymore. They’re certainly not going to get it from the media anymore. Well, where are they going to get it? Dad, it is your responsibility. You say, “Well, pastor, I don’t know how to teach that.” Then, dad, I want to tell you that you need to learn. Right over here we have a bookstore. You go into that bookstore; there are some wonderful, wonderful books. Go in there and ask Brother Curtis, “Curtis, give me some books that will help me to learn something of our godly heritage, for the Bible says it is my responsibility to pass it on to my children so they can pass it on to their children.”

Did you know that we’re just one generation away from paganism? We have forgotten our roots. We have forgotten our history. Your children need to learn history. They need to learn the history of this nation. They need to learn the history of this church. This church didn’t just happen. I’m afraid there may be some people who come and join Bellevue Baptist Church and sit here in this beautiful spacious sanctuary and think all this just happened. I tell you we’re here because of the blood, sweat, tears, and

prayers of people who believe the Bible is the Word of God. And, you need to teach your children. If you don't know the history of this church, teach them the history of Bellevue Baptist Church. Teach them your family history. Families ought to have a history book and keep scrapbooks and keep pictures and keep mementos. And, when somebody is saved in your family, let it be a celebration. If you have little children who get saved when they're five, six, seven years of age, you say, "Well, I just hope they'll remember." Well, let me tell you a way that you can help them remember. Every year have a spiritual birthday for that child. I mean just make it as big as the other birthday parties. "This was the day when Sally got saved," "This was the day when Richard got saved," and, "We're going to celebrate what God has done and hand down that family heritage from generation to generation."

I'm telling you there are those who want to steal away our memories. There are those who want to decimate our heritage today. And, they want to take this root that was planted in Bible-believing soil and plant it in humanistic soil. And, may it never happen. And, God's people said... *Amen*.

II. We Must Protect Our Memory

Now, not only must we therefore proclaim our history, but—listen—we must protect our memory. Now, look. We just looked at the first six verses. Begin now with the seventh verse. God says that the fathers are to pass this down to the children, and here's why He says it's to be done: "*That they might set their hope in God,*"—now, watch this—"*and not forget the works of God...*"—underscore that—"*not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.*" And then, He gives an illustration. Here's the illustration: "*The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;*"—and, here's the word again—"*and forgot his works,*"—that is, they forgot His works—"*and his wonders that he had shewed them*" (Psalm 78:7–11).

Now, not only must we proclaim our history; we must protect our memory—we must protect our memory. In verse 7, He says not to forget it. And then, he went on, in verse 11, to say Ephraim forgot it. Now, it's so easy to forget. Ephraim went to battle against the Philistines, and Ephraim was defeated. That's the illustration he used. And, why was Ephraim defeated? He said there was no reason they should have been defeated. They were the most dominant tribe. They were the most numerous tribe. They had plenty of good weapons. Look in verse 9: "*The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.*" They lost a battle to an outside pagan force, not because they had to, but they forgot, they forgot, they forgot, they forgot where they

came from and whose they were.

Now, when we are cut off from our roots, the fruit will wither and die. Now, in this Psalm, there are three memory-killers, three things that caused Ephraim to forget; and, those are the same three things that will cause you to forget what I just told you in the first part. I said, we need to reclaim our history, and then, friend, we need to retain our memory. We need to reclaim our history, and then we need to retain our memory.

Now, what are the three memory-killers that caused these people to have spiritual amnesia, that caused Ephraim to be defeated when Ephraim didn't need to be defeated? May I give them to you? The lust of the flesh, the lure of the world, and the lies of Satan. Here they are. Look.

A. The Lust of the Flesh

First of all, the lust of the flesh. Go to verse 17: *"They sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness"* (Psalm 78:17). That is, they provoked God; they shook their fist in the face of God. They tempted God in their heart by asking meat or food for their lust. God bless them. But, oh, how they provoked God. How did they provoke God? By the lust of their flesh.

What is happening in America today? Hasn't God blessed America? But, look around. We see sexual permissiveness, the blatant parading of perversion, the casual disposal of unwanted, unborn children, the breakup of the family, the consuming interest with self and material acquisition, craving for more and more pleasure and drugs and sex. What does that do? It provokes God. Let me read what one man has written: "America is rolling in luxuries, rebelling in excesses, reeling in drunkenness, revolting in morals, and rocking in sin."

B. The Lure of the World

That ought to break our hearts. That will kill your memory—the lust of the flesh. But not only the lust of the flesh: the lure of the world. Look, if you will, in verses 40 and 41: *"How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!"* We make God heartbroken. *"Yea, they turned back and tempted God,"*—now, watch this—*"and limited the Holy One of Israel"* (Psalm 78:40–41). Do you know what they said? When it says, *"they turned back,"* they wanted to go back to Egypt.

Now, God had brought them out of bondage. God had brought them out of slavery, just as He brought our fathers out of bondage. But then, they wanted to turn back and go back the way they'd come. That's the lure of the world. Egypt stands for the world, the flesh, and the devil, and they wanted to turn back. And, the Bible says, they limited God. Do you know what that word *limited* really means? It means, "to circumscribe." It means, "to put a circle around it." Now, what they said is this: "Now, God, You have Your place; just stay in Your place—just stay in Your place. Don't get over here, God."

We don't want You out here. That's none of your business, God." And, there are plenty of people today who say, "Why don't you folks just keep religion in the walls of your church? Now, why don't you just crawl back under the rock where you came from?" Friend, we need to crawl from out of the rock and stand on the rock and tell this world what Jesus has to say to it. But, the people just want to limit God. They want to horizon God. The world literally means, "to make a horizon." God only gets so far, but there is the lure of the world.

For example, in America's schools today you cannot have vocal prayer in the classroom; you cannot read God's Word in the classroom, although our history is replete with God's Word. You cannot post the Ten Commandments across the wall. So, while the Ten Commandments are out, sex education is in. Distribution of birth control materials is in. Metal detectors are in. The police are in. And, the Ten Commandments are out. We've just limited God. We've said, "God, it's none of Your business. God, get out of our schools, and stay out."

C. The Lies of the Devil

The lust of the flesh. The lure of the world. The lies of the devil. Look, if you will, in verse 58: "*For they provoked him...*"—see, each time it says, they're provoking God, do you know what we're doing? We're sticking our finger in God's eye. That's what we're doing in America—"*they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images*" (Psalm 78:58). Those are the lies of the devil. That's false religion. So, we have the lust of the flesh. The lure of the world. The lies of the devil.

I'm reading a book now that I want to suggest that you get. It's called *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*. It's written by a man named Peter Jones. Gnosticism was one of the first heresies the church faced. Now, Gnosticism is coming back today, only you say, "I've never heard of Gnosticism." Well, Gnosticism and New Age religion are the same things, and Peter Jones asked this question, and I want to read to you: "Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions? Why is homosexuality on the rise? Why is it endorsed by Time Magazine, promoted on publicly funded radio, and featured in children's comic strips with great moral fervor and in the name of democracy? Why is feminism such a powerful force today? Why is this movement developing its own goddess spirituality? Why is witchcraft taught in certain California school districts? Why is feminist spirituality making enormous inroads into Christianity? Why is abortion a vitally important part of the feminist manifesto? Is ecology just a neutral concern about the survival of the planet, or does it too have a religious agenda? Why is American Indian nature religion being actively promoted? Why is the work ethic no longer working? Why is multiculturalism and political correctness so important on many college

campuses? Are these seemingly dis-connected issues related in any way to the so-called New Age Movement? Why are numerous New Age spiritual techniques for healing, peace of mind, and self-knowledge being publicized so vigorously in the media, and more and more utilized in the business world and the armed forces? The real question is this: Are these apparently disconnected issues really part of a coherent pagan ideology poised to impose its religious belief system on the New World Order (the Age of Aquarius) of the twenty-first century?"

You see, verse 58: *"They provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images."* It is not that America has failed to be religious. We are religious people. But, most people in America today need to turn from religion today to Jesus Christ.

Now, it is the father's duty. Dads, listen to me. It is your duty, not only to reclaim our history, but to preserve our memory. Don't let the lust of the flesh, the lure of the world, and the lies of the devil provoke God to anger. You've got to keep the fire burning; you've got to keep the flame burning in your children's hearts. Dad, if you don't do it, no one else will do it.

III. We Must Preserve Our Legacy

Now, when we proclaim our history, when we protect our memory, then we're going to preserve our legacy. Look at verses 59 through 61: *"When God heard this,"*—when God heard what Ephraim did; look—*"he was wroth,"*—that means He was angry—*"and greatly abhorred Israel"* (Psalm 78:59). Now, remember, Israel, these were the chosen people. America's not a chosen race. The Jews are the chosen race. Israel was the chosen nation. And, the Bible says He abhorred Israel. Why has God blessed America? Is America like Israel? Are we a chosen nation? No. We are blessed, not because God chose us, but thankfully, by His grace, that we chose Him. We chose Him. We just said, *"We want to be a Christian people."* We're choosing God. We're choosing these principles, and the Bible says, *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD"* (Psalm 33:12). If anybody wants to be blessed, God says, *"Help yourself. If you want to choose Me, fine, just help yourself."* But now, listen: *"When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand"* (Psalm 78:59–61). That's what God did. That's what God did to the ancient people Israel.

Do you think that America is *carte blanche* able to sin and get away with it? Do you think that we can keep sticking our finger in God's eye and get away with it? Friend, we need to reclaim our history, we need to reinforce our memory, we need to preserve our legacy, because I get to thinking what kind of a nation are we leaving our children, what

kind of a nation are we leaving to our grandchildren. I'd much rather—much rather, much rather—leave a godly nation than to leave them a fortune. Hadn't you? Much rather. Just let them have a land they could grow up in where we can preach and teach Jesus Christ, where there can be righteousness and holiness to grow up in, where we can preach and teach Jesus Christ, where there can be righteousness and holiness and wholesomeness. Oh, we must preserve—we must preserve, we must preserve—our legacy.

Conclusion

A woman was visiting in Europe and was shopping, as women are wont to do. And, she went into a jewelry store, so I'm told, and in this jewelry store, she saw a gorgeous piece of jewelry. It was beautiful, and she wanted it, and she wired it to her husband and said, "Here's a piece of jewelry." She described it to him and said, "Here is the price." And, it was a big price, folks. And, she said, "May I buy it?" The man, when he heard it all, he wired back, "No. Price too high." You know how she read it? "No price too high—no price too high." And, she bought it and brought it home.

You know I think about our freedoms that we have today, and I ask, will you do this? And, there are some who are going to say, "Nope, the price is too high." But, I want to tell you something, friend. When you consider what is at stake, there is no price too high—none. Our lives, our fortunes, our sacred honor.

We need to teach our history. We need to revive our memory, and we need to hold our legacy. And, may God help us to do it on this 4th of July.

Will God Impeach America?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: May 9, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 80

*“Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that
all they which pass by the way do pluck her?”*

PSALMS 80:12

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Great National Despair
 - A. Spiritual Sterility
 - B. Personal Sorrow
 - C. National Shame
- II. A Glorious National Design
 - A. A Nation Divinely Planted
 - B. A Nation Divinely Prospered
 - C. A Nation Divinely Protected
- III. A Grave National Danger
 - A. External Danger from Her Enemies
 - B. Internal Danger from Corruption
 - C. Eternal Danger from God
- IV. A Gracious National Deliverance
 - A. We Must Look Up
 - B. We Must Confess Up
 - C. We Must Speak Up
 - D. We Must Stand Up

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to Psalms chapter 80, would you please—Psalms chapter 80. God is speaking about the nation Israel, and He asks a question in verse 12. Look at it. He says, *“Why hast thou then broken down her hedges...”*—now, God had put hedges around the nation Israel, and now it seems that God has taken down the hedge. And then, it says—*“Why hast thou then taken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar”*—that is, the wild hog of the wood—*“doth waste it,”*—waste what? The nation Israel—*“and the wild beast of the field doth devour it”* (Psalm 80:12–13).

God took down the hedge. The question that I ask this morning is this: Will God

impeach America? I say with a broken heart that America, our God-blessed America, is sick unto death. We are in a moral freefall, and soon we are going to hit bottom, and there will be no repair. And, America will become a molded crust in history's garbage can if something is not done radical and dramatic, and done quickly.

Now, what we have here in Psalm 80 is a prayer of revival. It's the prayer of a patriot. And, he's praying for a national revival. He's praying for spiritual restoration. Look, if you will, in verses 1 to 3: *"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved"* (Psalm 80:1–3).

And then, look, if you will, in verse 7: *"Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved"* (Psalm 80:7). This is a prayer for revival. And, it was a prayer in desperate days. There are four things in this Psalm I want you to see today. And, on this Mother's Day, I want you to see how applicable they are to America today.

I. A Great National Despair

The first thing I want you to see is that there was great national despair—great national despair. What was this despair?

A. Spiritual Sterility

Well, look in verse 4. There was a spiritual sterility. He says, *"O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"* (Psalm 80:4). Spiritual sterility. The people are praying, but God is not answering the prayer. Contrariwise, not only is God not answering the prayer; the prayer of the people was making God angry. Did you know that the prayer of an unrepentant people is an insult to Almighty God? Religion without righteousness is repugnant to God. America is praying. We just had a national day of prayer. All of the big shots gather every so often to pray. Yet the cesspools of iniquity are full and running over, and God is angry at the prayers of His people. *We spend six days a week sowing wild oats and then come on Sunday to pray for crop failure.* And, so much of our praying is, "God, bless us. Just bless us, anyhow." But, God is not going to do that.

B. Personal Sorrow

There was in this nation so long ago spiritual sterility. And, that spiritual sterility in verse 4 is compounded by personal sorrow in verse 5. Look at it: *"Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure"* (Psalm 80:5). This was a nation baptized with salty tears. Why? Because sorrow follows sin as night follows day. The Bible says, in Proverbs 29:2, that, *"When the wicked beareth rule, the people*

mourn.” And, we are seeing that in America. And, I wonder if oceans of tears, rivers of blood, seas of sweat will be the price that America must pay.

C. National Shame

But, not only was there spiritual sterility, not only was there personal sorrow; there was also national shame. Look in verse 6: *“Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves”* (Psalm 80:6). Do you know what God-blessed America is known as in many parts of the world? The Great Satan. Do you know what is happening in China this morning? This morning they are throwing rocks at the American Embassy. There are demonstrations against America all over this world. No longer is America respected for her ideals. No longer is America respected for her leadership and her moral strength. And, I personally blush when our President goes abroad to speak for us. I personally hang my head in shame that a known adulterer and perjurer is going abroad to speak for God-blessed America. It’s a shame! But, it breaks my heart. *“Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves.”* And so, that’s the first thing I want you to see.

II. A Glorious National Design

There was, dear friend, in this passage a great national despair. There had been a glorious national design. There had been. Look, if you will, in verses 8 and following. Here’s what God said He did for Israel: *“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt:”—*now, He’s calling His people a vine, like a grapevine—*“thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it”* (Psalm 80:8). What He is talking about here is the Jewish nation coming out of bondage in Egypt where they had broken the gnawing and tormenting chains of slavery. And, they had come to a new land, and there God planted them in the land of Canaan. Notice how he describes it: *“Thou preparedst room before it,”—*that is, before the vine—*“and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river”* (Psalm 80:9–11).

A. A Nation Divinely Planted

Now, what is he saying? There had been a glorious national design. This was a nation divinely planted. Do you see that in verse 8? God planted the nation Israel. And, I want to say there is a striking parallel between Israel of old and America today. The two are not the same. They are not synonymous. But, I want to say—and I believe with all of my heart—that America was a God-planted, God-blessed, God-ordained nation. No nation—listen to me—no nation ever had such a Christian beginning as America.

Now, Israel was a vine planted by God, and yet Israel forgot God, and judgment came. The American dream was placed into the bosom of our Founding Fathers, I

believe, by God Himself. The original colonies that came to these shores were founded because of the Christian faith. In 1620, when the Pilgrims came to America, they came seeking religious liberty and freedom. They huddled beneath the decks of that little Mayflower ship and they wrote The Mayflower Compact which began with these words, “In the name of God, Amen.” And, they wrote in their Compact that their voyage to these shores was for—and I quote: “for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith.”

Now, boys and girls today are not being taught this in school. We have what we call in history a revisionist. That is, these who want to rewrite history. But, I want to quote this morning, and I want you to listen very carefully to what former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Earl Warren, had to say. Now, it’s very important that you listen to this, because by no stretch of the imagination could you call former Chief Justice Earl Warren a right-wing Christian. As a matter of fact, when I was a young man, you would go up and down the highways of America and you would see signs that would say, “Impeach Earl Warren.” There were people who thought of him as being a part of the liberal left. Now, the reason I say that is this: you must understand what Earl Warren said in the light of the fact that he was known not as a part of the Christian Right. I’m quoting now a speech reported in *Time* magazine that he gave in 1954. This is the Supreme Court Chief Justice. I want you to listen to it. We’re talking about the fact that America was divinely planted. He said—and I quote: “I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book”—talking about the Bible—”and the spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses. Whether we look to the first Charter of Virginia or the Charter of New England or the Charter of Massachusetts Bay or the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, the same objective is present—a Christian land governed by Christian principles.”

Now, folks, I want to say that is very politically incorrect today. Do you understand that? Now, listen, he goes on to say, “I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it: freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under law, and the reservation of powers to the people.” The Chief Justice went on to say, “I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country.” I am talking about the fact that America, like Israel, was divinely planted.

And, we knew that. That’s the reason our national hymn, “America,” says,

*Our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.*

*Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might.*

Now listen to this,

Great God our King.
—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Don't ever say that the United States did not have a king. Our King ruled in the heavens. We believed that. We have sung it. *Our forefathers believed in separation of church and state, rightly understood, but never for a moment in the separation of God and government.*

B. A Nation Divinely Prospered

Israel was divinely planted, in verse 8, and divinely prospered. Look again, if you will, in verses 10 and 11 in this same Psalm. He says, *"The hills were covered with the shadow of it,"*—what? The vine that God planted—*"and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river"* (Psalm 80:10–11). The prophets of ancient Israel taught the right of the personal ownership of property. They taught the dignity of work. They taught honor. And, Israel prospered. And, America has prospered. No nation has ever had the prosperity of America. We talk about poverty in America, and we ought to do all we can do to eradicate any of it, but the poor in America are rich compared to many of the peoples of this world.

And, the fruit of that prosperity that God gave to Israel was for God's glory. Look in verse 15: *"And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself"* (Psalm 80:15). God did not bless America so that theology could be replaced with *me-ology*, where people could say, "God doesn't matter. All that matters is the Dow Jones."

C. A Nation Divinely Protected

Israel was divinely planted; America divinely planted. Israel divinely prospered; America divinely prospered. And, Israel was divinely protected. Look, if you will, in verse 12: *"Why hast thou broken down her hedges...?"* (Psalm 80:12). In Bible times, when a man would plant a vineyard, he would put a thorn hedge around that vineyard to keep out the predators and to keep out the thieves. God said, "I planted this vine, and I put a hedge around this vine." May I say also that God has planted America and God has protected America. This nation has been protected in a war-torn world. Compare America, compare these blessed shores, to what has happened in England, in France, in Germany, in Italy, in Japan and Korea and Russia, in Vietnam, and now in Yugoslavia. God has protected America. God put a hedge around America, and we knew it. "Protect us by Thy might, great God our King." Israel's first line of defense—are you listening?—

was God Himself. Not alliances. Not weapons of war, but God Almighty. And, God Almighty in time past has protected America. And, we've all had a sense that God's hand has been upon America.

III. A Grave National Danger

Now, here is a third thing I want you to see. I want you to see not only national despair, and national design, but I want you to see a grave national danger. We at this moment are at a point of grave national danger. And, what is that danger? It's found in verse 12: *"Why hast thou then broken down her hedges...?"* (Psalm 80:12). You see, God has put a hedge around Israel, but then God broke down the hedge. God has put a hedge around America, but the hedge, I'm afraid, has been taken away.

Have you ever thought about the doctrine of hedges? Do you remember the story of Job in the Bible? The devil could hardly wait to get his hands on Job. He's saying to God that, Job, the only reason he serves you is because You have petted him, You have prospered him, You have protected him. I can't get to him. You have built a hedge around Job. Every time I try to get to Job, there's your hedge. Take down the hedge; let me get at him." God says, "You don't know my servant Job." You might find this, by the way, in Job chapter 1, verses 9 and 10: *"Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?"* (Job 1:9–10). You see, there is a doctrine of hedges. The devil can't get through the hedge.

Now, what God had done for Job, God has also done for nations, God did for Israel. Let me give you another corresponding passage, Isaiah chapter 5; let me share it with you. I copied it out to save time, but write it down in your margin—Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 through 5: *"Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard."* He's talking about Israel now. *"My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem,"*—listen to what God says to His ancient people, Jerusalem, God-blessed Jerusalem—*"and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I tell you what I will do to my vineyard:"*—listen to this now—*"I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down"* (Isaiah 5:1–5).

Now, God said, "Look. I founded this nation. I protected this nation. I put a hedge around this nation. And, I was expecting that it would bring forth good grapes. But, it

brought forth wild grapes. Now, I am going to take down the hedge. Pastor Joe Wright of Kansas was asked to lead the Kansas state House of Representatives in prayer. They were expecting the normal flabby, perfunctory prayer there. But, Pastor Joe Wright stood up and prayed—and here's what he prayed. Now, I want you to listen to this prayer, because when he prayed, the senators began to get up and walk out during the prayer. Here's what he prayed: "Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and seek your direction and guidance. We know your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that's exactly what we've done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values." And then, Pastor Joe went on to pray, "We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of your Word and called it moral pluralism. We have worshipped other gods and called it multi-culturalism. We have endorsed perversion and called it an alternative lifestyle. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have neglected the needy and called it self-preservation. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed our unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable. We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building esteem. We have abused power and called it political savvy. We have coveted our neighbors' possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression. We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our fore-fathers and called it enlightenment. Search us O God and know our hearts today; try us and see if there be some wicked way in us; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas, and who have been ordained by you, to govern this great state. Grant them your wisdom to rule and may their decisions direct us to the center of your will. I ask it in the name of your son, the living savior, Jesus Christ. Amen."

That's what he prayed. Paul Harvey read this prayer on his program, and he got more requests for copies than any other thing he had ever done. I say, God give us some more pastors like Joe Wright who understand that God who put this vineyard here has a right not to ask for wild grapes.

Now, what has been the result? What is this grave national danger?

A. External Danger from Her Enemies

Well, there was external danger from her enemies. Look in verse 12: "*Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?*" (Psalm 80:12). America's natural resources are being stripped away. We are at the same time losing our resources and losing our friends. I say, we're known as the great Satan. People are plucking this vineyard. China, Red China, has plucked the vineyard; they now have our nuclear secrets. They now can put a missile on any major city in the

United States, because the vine has been plucked.

B. Internal Danger from Corruption

External danger from her enemies. Internal danger from corruption. Look in verse 13: *“The boar”*—the wild hog—*“of the wood doth waste it”* (Psalm 80:13). Now, a hog is not only content to eat the fruit; the hog deals with the root. Something is happening in America that is very un-American. America has become so amoral and immoral, so corrupt, so vile. For further information, consult the front page of any newspaper. Friend, a tidal wave of filth is sweeping across America. Crookedness, lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, divorce, murder, lust, dope, vice—we say America is number one. She’s number one in homosexuality, number one in radical feminism, number one in divorce, number one in the destruction of family values, number one in abortion, number one in political correctness, number one in occult humanistic New Age religion. That’s America. I’m telling you, we’re in a moral freefall.

Think of what is happening in the schools of America. We’re shocked by what happened in Littleton, but why? Prayer is out; policemen are in. Bibles are out; values clarification is in. The Ten Commandments are out; rape and armed robbery and murder and bombs are in. Creation is out; evolution is in. Corporal punishment is out; disrespect and rebellion is in. Traditional values are out; unwed motherhood is in. Abstinence is out; condoms and abortion are in. Learning is out; social engineering is in. Happy days are out; Gothic fashion, Marilyn Manson, gangster rap, heavy rock, heavy metal is in. Blasphemy is in; praise is out. In a public school you can tell someone to go to Hell. Friend, I think it’s time we told them to go to Heaven. I think it’s time that we spoke up.

C. Eternal Danger from God

There is external danger—verse 12. There is internal danger—verse 13. And, there is eternal danger, verses 14 and 15. Look at it: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself”* (Psalm 80:14–15). Now, watch this in verse 16: *“It”*—the vine—*“is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance”* (Psalm 80:16).

Now, it is God Himself who is bringing judgment. God’s judgment is like an ax, according to this verse, laid to the root of the tree. God’s judgment is like a consuming fire. And, that’s what’s happening in America. Come up close, and I want to tell you something, friend. *Not only is God America’s only hope; God is America’s biggest threat*—God is America’s biggest threat. Look at it again, verse 16, *“It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.”*

Now, what we have done is we have expelled God from our schools and from our

government, and God is about ready to impeach America. You say, “How can you say that we’ve expelled God?” Well now, listen to what happened. The United States Supreme Court banned prayer in public schools in 1962. Then, in 1963, they banned the Bible. Now, evidently, we’d been doing something wrong for a long time. But then, in 1963, they banned the Bible. And then, the Ten Commandments were banned in 1980. What we have become is legally an atheistic state. There is presently more religious freedom in the former Soviet Union than there is in America today.

Now, this was compounded by 1973 when abortion on demand was legalized, little babies in the mother’s womb were given the status of non-beings. January 22, 1973 surely is going to go down as the blackest day in American history, when nine Supreme Court justices, self-anointed priests of humanism, said that these little babies are not real human beings. And, the soil of America has been stained since that time with the blood of 40 million aborted babies.

Friend, there’s something awfully wrong in America. You see, we’ve expelled God from America. There’s no room for God. I was listening last Sunday morning to the news, as I sometimes do before I preach, and I heard William Bennett, former Secretary of Education, speak on a forum. They talked about what happened in Columbine High School out in Colorado. And, he questioned how the staff and faculty in Columbine High could have failed to do anything about these guys walking around in trench coats and saying, “*Heil Hitler.*” Mr. Bennett went on to say he guarantees someone would have noticed Cassie Bernall—she was the little girl who was shot for her faith—if Cassie Bernall, a born-again Christian and one of the victims of the slaughter, had been carrying a Bible around the school and praising Jesus Christ. Cassie, a junior, was fatally shot by one of the gunmen after he asked her if she believed in God and she said yes. If little Cassie and her friends had been walking through the schools carrying Bibles and saying, “Hail the Prince of Peace, King of kings,” they would have been hauled into the principal’s office, Mr. Bennett said on Meet the Press. But, others can walk through the halls and say, “*Heil Hitler.*” Something is wrong in America, folks.

Now, let me tell you. You want me to put it in a sentence, what is wrong in America? The hedge is down. How else do you explain what is happening in God-blessed America? You see, why are we suffering all of these problems? We’re so jaded, it’s almost like we have the tragedy *du jour*, the tragedy of the day. I listen to the radio, now what’s happened? Well, we mistakenly bombed the Chinese Embassy. Now, what has happened? We’ve had a tornado that comes ripping through the heartland. Now, what has happened? We’ve had a student shot here. Now, what has happened? We’ve had this thing over here. One thing after another. Why is this? Because, friend, the hedge is down. It began in 1962 when we kicked God out, and the judgment is ripening.

Listen to this. In the mid 1980s, the Midwest and California suffered the worst

drought in history. Then, that drought was followed by record rains in both of these sections, and the drought was followed by severe flooding. In 1989, Hurricane Hugo struck Charleston, South Carolina, doing immense damage. After Hugo, a powerful earthquake rocked San Francisco. In 1992, 10 of the most powerful quakes in the world in 1992 were centered in California, including the most powerful earthquake in the world that year, 7.6 magnitude in California. On the heels of that, in 1992, Hurricane Andrew, one of the most powerful and destructive ever, hit southern Florida. And then, in that same year, the worst rioting since the Civil War took place in Los Angeles. And then, a number of tornados swept across America. And then, a record forest fire swept through the West, especially in California. In 1993, record storms slammed the east coast of this nation. And then, in 1993, the worst terrorist attack in American history struck New York City. And then, California was again hit with record wildfires. And then, we began mass killings and serial killings in America. They have become a regular occurrence since, in the 1990s. And then, in 1994, the coldest temperatures ever recorded since records have been kept, since the 1880s, covered the Midwest and the East. The cold was so intense that the wind chill hit near 90 below in some states.

We say, "Well, pastor, the economy's doing good." Did you know that in the 80s America went from being the world's largest creditor nation to the world's largest debtor nation? Did you know that? In the 80s. Did you know that from 1990 to 1998 nine million Americans went bankrupt, and that is a record since the Great Depression? And then, people are saying, "What about the tornados in Oklahoma?" We've never had one like that in the history of America, these great tornados that are coming by. You say, "Well, pastor, is God doing all of that?" No! The hedge is down. This is what the enemy has been wanting to do for a long time. He's just been walking around, saying, "How can I get in? How can I get in? How can I get in? I can't get in. I can't get in." Oh, this is a God-blessed America, but America says, "God, we don't want You! Out, out, out of our schools, out of our government. We don't want You, God." Do you know what the prayer was when the Supreme Court ruled that our children could not pray in school? Was it a great terrible prayer they prayed? No, here's what they prayed: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee. We beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, our country. Amen." "Oh," they said, "you can't do that in America. We don't want the Bible; we don't want prayer; we don't want the Ten Commandments. We'll handle it ourselves." God says, "I'll just take away the hedge." Leviticus 18, verse 25: *"And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it"* (Leviticus 18:25).

IV. A Gracious National Deliverance

One last thing. There may be, friend, a gracious national deliverance. It's not too late.

Notice the prayer of this patriot, beginning in verse 14: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself”* (Psalm 80:14). What should we do this Mother’s Day?

A. We Must Look Up

Number one: We must look up—look up. Look in verse 14: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts”* (Psalm 80:14). God is the only One big enough, strong enough, wise enough to deliver and save us, and we must seek God’s face and not God’s hand. Notice verse 19: *“Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved”* (Psalm 80:19). We need to return unto God with fasting, praying, weeping—an old-fashioned revival. And, don’t worry about who the elected officers are in the White House or the state house. God doesn’t have to route revival through Washington.

B. We Must Confess Up

We must look up. We must confess up. Look, if you will, in verse 16: *“[This vine] is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance”* (Psalm 80:16). It is sin that caused God to take down the hedge. We must confess and turn from our wicked way.”

C. We Must Speak Up

Number three: Not only must we look up, and confess up; we must speak up. Look in verse 17: *“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself”* (Psalm 80:17). And, by the way, who is it that he’s talking about here? He’s talking about Jesus Christ. That’s who he’s talking about in this verse. This is a prophetic Psalm. He’s saying that the hope is in the Son of God. *“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,”*—that’s Jesus—*“upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself.”* And, in the name of Jesus, we need to speak up. They tell us to go back under the rock: we need to come out from under the rock and stand on this rock, the Lord Jesus Christ.

People say, “Oh, that’s politics and religion.” Let me tell you something about the church: *the church is not the master of the state, nor is the church the servant of the state; the church is the conscience of the state*. We need to speak up and say what God’s Word says. Satan’s strategy is to keep good people, good men, good women, silent in evil times. And, you need to tell your boys and girls when they step on school property they still have full amendment rights and freedom of speech to pray, to carry their Bibles, and to witness for Jesus Christ. “But, Pastor Rogers, you’re so insensitive. Don’t you know that if your children pray, somebody might be offended?” Friend, our

children are offended every day at school: offended by militant atheism, by humanism, by pornography, by heavy rock music, by profanity, amoral sex education. By the way, there is nothing in the First Amendment that says that somebody is protected from being offended. The Bible teaches that we're to speak, and our Constitution says that nobody shall abridge our rights to speak.

D. We Must Stand Up

And so, what I'm trying to say is that we must look up, we must confess up, we must speak up, and we must stand up. Look again in verse 18: *"So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name"* (Psalm 80:18). We don't have to have great numbers. Lenin began his Communist Revolution in 1917 with just several thousand. Castro took Cuba, I can remember, with a little band of cutthroats. On the positive side, Jesus started with 12 disciples. Joshua 23, verse 10: *"One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised"* (Joshua 23:10). It's just time we stood up. You know what's wrong with so many of us now? We are so shell-shocked, it's been coming at us—bad news—it's like we're drinking from a fire hose. Friend, it's hard to build a dam when you're floating down the stream.

We need to look up, we need to confess up, we need to speak up, we need to stand up, and we need for God to bless America one more time.

When I was a little boy, the Japanese dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor. Afterward, the United States rallied and won the war. Admiral Yamamoto—you remember him, Yamamoto? You know what he said later on? Here's a quote, I want you to listen to it. He said, "I had intended to deal a fatal blow to the American fleet by attacking Pearl Harbor. I fear that all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." He said, "I thought this would destroy them, but all it did was just to fill them with a terrible resolve," and they won the war.

Conclusion

Now, what I want to say, dear friend, is this: It's time that God's people were filled with a terrible resolve. It's time we said, "Oh, God, here's a vine. We're in great despair. But, Lord, there was a glorious design! But, Lord, there's grave danger! But, oh, God, give us deliverance! Please, oh, God!" "Pastor Rogers, you know, this is Mother's Day. I mean, we just came to smell flowers, we just came to hug mamas. We just came to celebrate babies." Friend, there won't be any flowers, any mamas, any hugs, if we don't take this nation back. It is time for God to work in America.

I was talking to somebody the other day. He was talking about Hollywood and everything, and the government and all of these things, and they said, "It's not a fair

fight.” And, I said, “Your right. It’s not a fair fight. For their sake, it’s not a fair fight. We’re the ones who have the advantage, not them.” Friend, we’ve got the Word, the Holy Ghost; we’ve got God. They’re the ones who ought to be afraid. This is our battle-axe. Jesus is our commander. The Holy Spirit is our ally. And, victory is ours through the man of God’s right hand, the man of His choosing, Jesus Christ.

A Miracle for America

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 13, 1991

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 80:1–3

“Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.”

PSALMS 80:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Glorious National Design
 - A. Israel Was Divinely Planted
 - B. Israel Was Divinely Protected
 - C. Israel Was Divinely Prospered
- II. A Grave National Danger
 - A. External Danger
 - B. Internal Danger
 - C. Eternal Danger
- III. A Great National Despair
 - A. Spiritual Sterility
 - B. Personal Sorrow
 - C. National Shame
- IV. Gracious National Deliverance
 - A. The Man of God
 - B. The Movement of God
 - C. The Miracle of God
 - 1. We Must Look Up
 - 2. We Must Confess Up
 - 3. We Must Speak Up
 - 4. We Must Stand Up

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn with me to the Book of Psalms, please—Psalm 80. And, in a few moments we’re going to read together the first three verses of Psalm 80. America and the world are in an unprecedented crisis. I believe it was Paul Harvey who said some time ago, “When little men cast long shadows, you know the sun is about to set.” There’s a little man in the Middle East, Saddam Hussein. He’s cast a very long shadow, and today we are in a crisis. God alone knows what the next few days will bring. But, we need a Miracle for

America. The title of my message this morning is just that: “A Miracle for America.”

I am convinced that this nation, a nation so blessed by God, is the greatest nation, I believe, on the face of the earth today. This nation born July 4, 1776 in Philadelphia must be born again, or we will perish. Perhaps someday some historian will write “The Rise and Fall of the American Empire.” And, may I tell you, dear friend, that the nation Israel had a history very much like the history of America.

Israel, like America, had a glorious heritage. Israel, like America, was the wonder of the world in her time. Israel, like America, had broken the gnawing and tormenting chains of Egyptian bondage and had become a nation so glorious and so wonderful that all of the nations of the world were astounded at what God had done for her. And then, Israel forgot God, and judgment came, and there was time of national calamity.

The Psalm that I have for you this morning is a Psalm that was written in a time of national calamity. Begin to read with me in Psalm 80, verse 1: *“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved”* (Psalm 80:1–3). “Turn us again. Put us back, O God, like we were. Restore us, Lord. Oh, God, cause Your face to shine upon us.”

Let me read to you the words of another. He said, “We must confess with a troubled heart that America has forgotten God. She is rolling in luxuries, reveling in excesses, rollicking in pleasure, reeling in drunkenness, revolting in morals, and rotting in sin.” And, this perceptive writer went on to say, “Our nation is perfumed with an aroma of religion and culture, but it is only the spiritual formaldehyde disguising the deadly decay of a society on its last legs.”

Oh, my dear friends—my dear, dear friends—I must tell you with all of the function and emotion of my soul that we need in these days “A Miracle for America.” If you’re trusting today in our armaments, you’re foolish. “Some trust in horses, some trust in chariots, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7). If you trust in an alliance with Saudi Arabia, in an alliance with Egypt, in an alliance with Europe, and with the Soviets, my dear friend, you are leaning on a broken reed. We need “A Miracle for America.”

I. A Glorious National Design

I want you to look at this Psalm with me today, and I want you to see, first of all, how God had blessed the nation Israel. And then, I want to make an application and show you a parallel between Israel and America. I know this Psalm is not talking about America per se, but there are principles here, there are parallels here, that the discerning eye can see and the ready heart can apply.

A. Israel Was Divinely Planted

First of all, I want you to see that Israel was divinely planted—divinely planted. Look in verse 8: *“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it”* (Psalm 80: 8). Now, the vine that he’s talking about is the nation Israel. Israel was called “God’s vine.” And, God Himself put Israel in her land. God Himself gave Israel the land of Canaan. And, I believe, correspondingly, that America has been a vine divinely planted.

The American dream was placed in the bosom of our Founding Fathers, I firmly believe, by God Himself. No other nation ever had such a Christian beginning as did the United States of America. Our original colonies were founded because of the Christian faith. The Pilgrims who came to our shores came here in 1620; they were seeking religious freedom and the freedom to preach the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Mayflower Compact that they wrote as they got beneath the decks of that little ship, bowed in prayer, and then wrote out this solemn agreement that they called the Mayflower Compact began with these words: “In the name of God, Amen.” That’s the way they started. And, they wrote in that Mayflower Compact that their express purpose was—and you listen; these were the desires of our Pilgrim Fathers: “For the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith.” That’s what impelled those Pilgrims as they came to our shores.

Roger Batson was talking with a South American president many years ago. They were trying to discern the difference between North America and South America, and why God had so blessed North America rather than South America, and why had North America so prospered. The same natural resources, and perhaps greater, can be found in South America. This South American president said to Roger Batson—he said, “Those who came to our shores came seeking gold; those who came to your shores came seeking God.” I believe that, dear friend.

Our government is rooted—listen to me; listen—our government is rooted in a belief in Almighty God. I’ve talked about America being born in 1776. The Declaration of Independence begins this way: “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” They didn’t quiver, they didn’t argue about it, they didn’t stutter, they didn’t stammer, and they didn’t hesitate. They said, “This is self-evident.” “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” And, in that one sentence, you see, my dear friend, that they believed that man was the creation of God. They didn’t believe in evolution. They believed in a God who created man. They believed in God: “All men are...endowed by their Creator.” And, they believed in a system of absolute morals, and “certain unalienable Rights.” That is, no ifs and ands or buts about these things. There was a fixed standard.

It is indeed true that we wrote into the Bill of Rights the First Amendment. But, my

dear friend, may I tell you that the First Amendment was never meant to prohibit anybody, any American, from praying in any place. It simply meant that no one should be coerced to pray. A freeborn American by the grace of God should be allowed to pray any place, anytime, anywhere.

The great leaders of our nation, for the most part, have been men of faith. Those men who signed the Declaration of Independence, 55 of those men signed it: 30 of them were bold Christians; 20 of them were believing Christians, who believed in this book and this faith.

General George Washington, the Father of Our Country and the first President of the United States, was a devout man who went alone and got on his knees to pray God's blessing on his little ragtag army there at Valley Forge as he kneeled in the snow and asked God to bless. A man came to the Continental Congress; he wanted to know which one was George Washington. Somebody said, "George Washington is the tall red-headed man who will get on his knees when the Congress stops to pray."

Abraham Lincoln, President-elect Lincoln, said—I quote his words: "I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington." And then, here's what Lincoln said: "Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail." He believed in God.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The god who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time."

We have some revisionists today, some humanists, some secularists, and some atheists, who would like somehow to extract all belief in God from our American way of life. But, my dear friend, you cannot do it. It is written into the warp and woof of our American fabric. Listen to our national Anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." Listen to these words:

*Blest with vict'ry and peace,
May the Heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made
And preserved us a nation!*

—the power that hath made and preserved us a nation—

*Then conquer we must,
When our cause it is just
And this be our motto:
"In God is our trust."*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

Oh, my dear friend, this is a nation that was born in the fire of revival. Our national hymn simply says,

*Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.*

*Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

—listen to it now. Don't ever tell me that American doesn't have a king—

Great God our King.

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

You let these humanists come along, you let these revisionists of history come along, you let these atheists come along, you let these secularists come along and tell you that we have no right to speak of God in America and to put the principles of God in our government: I tell you, they are wrong—they're wrong. Americans believe in the separation of church and state, but not for a skinny moment do they believe in the separation of government from God. You read it, my dear friend: it's there. It's there, and anybody can read it.

B. Israel Was Divinely Protected

Now, listen. Let me tell you that Israel, my dear friend, was divinely planted. May I tell you, secondly, that Israel was divinely protected. Look again, if you will, in verse 9: *"Thou preparedst room before it,"*—that is, that vine—*"and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land"* (Psalm 80:9).

Now, what does that mean when it says here that, *"Thou preparedst room before it"*? That is, that God went before these people, and God Himself drove out their enemies, and God Himself gave them that land. Israel, divinely planted; Israel, divinely protected.

And, so it has been with America. Oh, how God has blessed America! God has protected this nation in a war-torn world. Compare what has happened to America to England and France and Germany and Italy and Japan and Russia and Korea and Vietnam and the Middle East. How God has protected America! We've not seen the bombs fall here. We've not seen the things happen here that other nations have seen happen. Why? Because God has been so gracious to us.

*Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.*

*Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

Great God our King.

C. Israel Was Divinely Prospered

But, not only was Israel divinely planted, and divinely protected; it was, dear friend, divinely prospered. Look, if you will, in verses 10 and 11 of this same chapter: *“The hills were covered with the shadow of it,”*—that is, this vine—*“and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river”* (Psalm 80:10–11). Her prophets, the prophets of Israel, taught honest work; they taught the right of ownership, the right of personal property, and Israel prospered. That vine brought forth fruit. And, as America adhered to the principles of God’s Word, America prospered as a nation. We have poverty, but my dear friend, may I tell you that the poor in America are rich compared with many of the people in this world. God has blessed America from sea to shining sea.

II. A Grave National Danger

My dear friend, that was God’s wonderful and glorious national design for Israel. And, I see the parallel in America. But, not only was there a glorious national design; there was a grave national danger.

A. External Danger

What was the danger that Israel faced? Well, look if you will, in verse 12: *“Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?”* (Psalm 80:12). Here’s a vineyard, divinely planted, divinely protected, divinely prospered, and now suddenly God removes the hedge. There had been round about this vineyard a hedge. But, now the hedge, the wall, has been broken down. And, anybody who comes by can pluck that fruit.

So, we see America being plucked by her enemies, disintegrating before our eyes. And, we see, dear friend, that judgment is upon us. Verse 12, I believe, speaks of external danger: *“All they that pass by pluck her.”*

B. Internal Danger

Then, my dear friend, I want you to see, not only external danger, but internal danger. Verse 13: *“The boar”*—that means the wild hog—*“out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it”* (Psalm 80:13). Not only were there those who passed by that would pluck at her and zap her strength, but there were those internal within her, like wild beasts, like wild animals, that were rooting up the very vine that God had planted. A hog is not content merely feeding the fruit; it roots out the vine.

And, we’re having those in America who are doing something exactly like that: not only external danger from our enemies, but internal danger from corruption. Something has happened in America that is very un-American. Our nation is tottering. I’m not talking about danger from Saddam Hussein—we can handle him. I’m talking, ladies and

gentlemen, about that which is happening on the inside, which is far, far, far more frightening.

America has become so immoral and so corrupt and so vile that God must judge America. We've had more opportunities, more blessings, more preaching, more gospel than any other nation that has ever lived. And yet, at the same time, we have more policemen per capita than any nation in the world. And, we have more crime per capita. The vileness of our motion pictures and television is unbelievable. It's unbelievable the filth that you see. It's like a broken sewer has been poured out on America: crime, immorality, the breakup of the home, and a total disregard for the things of God in our national leadership.

If you don't believe what I'm saying is true, it's because you're deaf, blind, and dumb. My dear friend, just open your eyes. Pick up any newspaper and see what has become the norm. In our own beloved city of Memphis, we're seeing an epidemic of murder. There's a tidal wave across America of crookedness, lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, divorce, murder, lust, dope, and vice. They are wild hogs that are rooting up the vine.

C. Eternal Danger

Not only is there that external danger—verse 12; not only is there that internal danger—verse 13; but, my dear friend, there is eternal danger—verses 14 and following. I'm talking now about judgment from God. Verse 14: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire,”*—all right, there's been a vine that is planted, a vine that was protected, a vine that was prospered, and now it is burned with fire. Pay attention now—*“it is cut down:”*—not only has it been burned; it has been cut down. How? Look now very carefully at verse 16—*“they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance”* (Psalm 80:14–16). Enemies around, enemies within, but the great enemy above—above; external danger, internal danger, but my dear friend, eternal danger from God. If you don't hear anything else that I say in this message this morning, I want you to understand that *not only is God our only hope, but God is our biggest threat*.

The fire of God's judgment, and the axe of God's judgment, the fire to burn the vine, the axe laid to the very root, that's what he is talking about. You see, my dear friend, God's judgment is like an axe and like a fire. We have no right to believe that God is going to let this nation endure, unless we have a national revival. I don't know who it was who first said this, but I believe, with the sentiment of it, he said, “The raging waters of God's wrath are furiously pounding against the dam of His mercy.” And, I don't know when the dam of God's mercy will give way to the waters of God's wrath, but it is near

time in America. It is time in America that we repent.

III. A Great National Despair

I've talked to you about a glorious national design. I have talked to you about a grave national danger. Now, let me just compound it by talking to you about a great national despair. Go back and look, if you will, in verse 4 of this chapter. And, look very carefully here. What is the national despair? What is it that has impelled me on Sunday morning to bring this message to you? What is it that so grieves my heart?

A. Spiritual Sterility

Number one: spiritual sterility. Look in verse 4: *"O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"* (Psalm 80:4). Somebody says, "We need to pray, we need to pray, we need to pray." My dear friend, you can pray all you want. Your prayers will get no higher than these light bulbs; they'll only serve to make God angry, unless certain things happen. Don't think God is pleased every time someone prays. Sometimes when people pray, God gets angry. "How long, Lord, will You be angry at the prayers of Your people?" They pray, but there's no answer. The prayers of a wicked, unrepentant people only move God to anger. Religion without righteousness is repugnant to God, and the cesspool of iniquity is full and overrunning in America, and yet we *deign* to pray, "God bless America." It's a wonder He doesn't blot us off the face of the earth.

You say, "We're bad, but we're not as bad as they are." My dear friend, don't figure that way. *"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"* (Luke 12:20).

Americans have the idea that they can sow their wild oats six days a week and come to church on Sunday and pray for crop failure, and everything will be all right. But it will not be. Prayer is not some sort of a smokescreen where we can hide our sin. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). We just think, "Well, God will bless us anyhow." He's not going to do it.

B. Personal Sorrow

My dear friend, here is the great national despair. Number one: spiritual sterility. And, spiritual sterility is followed by personal sorrow. Look, if you will, in verse 5: *"Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure"* (Psalm 80:5). We cannot flaunt God and prosper. My dear friend, Israel was a nation baptized in salty tears, and so will America be. For sorrow follows sin like night follows day. We seek peace, but we'll not have it until we have an alliance with the Prince of Peace. The Bible says, in Proverbs chapter 29 and verse 2, *"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn"*

(Proverbs 29:2). I wonder, will oceans of tears and rivers of blood be the price that we are going to pay?

C. National Shame

Verse 4 speaks of spiritual sterility: we pray, but our prayers are not answered. Verse 5 speaks of personal sorrow, tears to drink. And, verse 6, here's the one that stirs me. Verse 6 speaks of national shame. Look: *"Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbors: and our enemies laugh among themselves"* (Psalm 80:6). The scream of the great American eagle has become the twitter of a frightened sparrow. They call us *the great Satan*; they laugh and they laugh. Once mighty God-blessed America has become the laughingstock of the nations. I'm not saying that we ought to swagger, saying, "We are the greatest; we are the best." But, I believe the Bible means it when it says, *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD"* (Psalm 33:12). Great national despair: spiritual sterility; personal sorrow; national shame.

IV. Gracious National Deliverance

"Well," you say, "pastor, what do you recommend?" I'm glad you asked. I want to tell you right out of this Psalm. Is there hope for America? Yes. Can there be a way in these last days? Absolutely. Let me give you, dear friend, the last thing that I want to talk to you about. There may be a gracious national deliverance. There was for Israel; there may be for us.

Begin now in this chapter and look in verse 14, if you will. Here's the prayer of a patriot. Listen to it: *"Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved"* (Psalm 80:14–19).

Now, my dear friend, there are three elements here that tell us this gracious national deliverance.

A. The Man of God

Number one is the man of God. Look in verses 14 and following. Look at it again: *"Return, we beseech thee, O Lord of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted,"*—now, watch it—*"and the branch"*—underscore the word branch—*"that thou madest strong for thyself."* Here's the vine, but there's a special branch in that vine. *"It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right*

hand...—in the original language, the word branch in verse 15 and the word man in verse 17 is the same word. There is a man who is a branch, and a branch who is a man: a man, a branch out of this nation—*“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,”*—there is a man at the right hand of the Majesty on High. Who is He?—*“upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself”* (Psalm 80:14–17). Do you know His name? It is Jesus, my dear friend. It is J-e-s-u-s. There must be the man of God. There must be a return to Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, the great God, our King.

B. The Movement of God

Not only is there the man of God; my dear friend, there must be the movement of God. Look in verse 18: *“So will we not go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name”* (Psalm 80:18). Oh, friend, I don’t know any other way except for God to move and for God to stir our hearts. We need *“A Miracle for America.”* We need for God to quicken us, for God to breathe on us, for God to blow on us, for God to move on us.

C. The Miracle of God

The movement of God. And then, last: the miracle of God. Verse 19: *“Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved”* (Psalm 80:19). Do you know what revival is? Revival, my friend, is the smile of God. It is the shining of God’s face upon a land one more time. Oh, when we enthrone the man of God, when we implore the movement of God, I believe we will see in America the miracle of God. God wants to bless. God wants to send revival. Look up here; let me tell you what we must do. Let me tell you what we must do in these days that are following.

1. We Must Look Up

Number one: We must look up—look up. There’s only One who can save us. His name is not George Bush. He does not have His headquarters in the Pentagon. He puts no trust in a PanAm jet. If you take God out of our government, our government is not any better than anyone else’s, to speak of. Why must we look to God? God is the only One big enough, wise enough, and strong enough to save us. It’s not too late. We need to look up to God.

2. We Must Confess Up

But, not only must we look up; we must confess up. I don’t want you to criticize the President. I don’t want you to criticize any congressman. I don’t want you to dissect this sermon, until you have gotten on your knees and your face before Almighty God and made certain there’s no unconfessed sin in your life. You hear me? Don’t you go around mouthing and talking about what this person ought to do and that person ought to do, and what you think.

3. We Must Speak Up

My dear friend, we need to look up, and we need to confess up, and then we need to speak up. I mean, we need to speak up in the name of Jesus, the righteous branch, the man of God's right hand. Satan's strategy is to keep good men silent in evil times.

4. We Must Stand Up

And then, we need to stand up. We need to stand up for what is right. You say, "But, pastor, we're so few, and they are so many." But, God always hears the prayer of a righteous remnant, if we will pray. We don't need great numbers. Dear friend, we don't need more people; we need better people.

Castro took Cuba with a band of eighty cutthroats. Lenin began his Communist Revolution with several thousands in 1917. Jesus began the mightiest movement the world has ever known with only 12 disciples. In Joshua chapter 23 and verse 10, the Bible says, "*One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you*" (Joshua 23:10). I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do, I ought to do, and what I can do, and ought to do, that, by the grace of God, I will do. Will you say that? Will you mean it? Would you pray with your pastor today, "God bless America"?

Conclusion

Listen to me. America is in trouble. And, what the world needs, and what America needs, and what this city needs, and what this church needs, and what every living soul needs, is a league with the Lord, an alliance with the Almighty, and a peace conference with the Prince of Peace. O God, make your face to shine on us.

God Bless America

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 4, 1982

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 80:1–19

“Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.”

PSALMS 80:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Glorious National Design
 - A. She was Divinely Planted
 - B. She was Divinely Protected
 - C. She was Divinely Productive
- II. A Grave National Danger
 - A. External Danger
 - B. Internal Danger
 - C. Eternal Danger
- III. A Great National Despair
 - A. Spiritual Sterility
 - B. Personal Sorrow
 - C. National Shame
- IV. A Gracious National Deliverance
 - A. We Must Look Up
 - B. We Must Confess Up
 - C. We Must Speak Up
 - D. We Must Stand Up

Conclusion

Introduction

All right. Now, I want you to take your Bible, please—take your Bible—and turn to Psalm 80. All right, Psalm 80. Get my motor started here. And, we’re going to be reading together the first three verses, and then, later, we’re going to be looking at the entire psalm under the heading “God Bless America.” Now, here is the prayer of the psalmist: he says, *“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved”* (Psalm 80:1–3).

Now, here Israel is praying for a national revival. Israel was a glorious nation, and

Israel had a glorious heritage. By faith they were delivered from the gnawing chains of Egyptian bondage, and they came out through the Red Sea and through the Sinai and into the Promised Land. And, never has there been a nation quite like the nation of Israel. God blessed that nation because God was their King, and God blessed them to such a degree that when the Queen of Sheba came, she said, “The half has never yet been told.” But, Israel got away from God. God gave to Israel a Lord, and God gave to Israel a land; and God gave to Israel a law. And, she denied the Lord, and she defied the law; and she defiled the land. And, God withdrew His blessings, and calamity came. And so, Israel is now praying, “O God, cause Your face to shine on us. O God, turn us back to You. Do it, Lord, and we’ll be saved” (Psalm 80:3). And, it was a prayer for God to bless Israel.

Now, I know that America is not Israel, but I am also keenly aware that there is a striking parallel between what happened to Israel in that day and what has happened to America in this day. And, I do not believe that I am outside the bounds of the scripture by making an application from this psalm to America and saying, as the psalmist wanted God to bless Israel long ago... Using this same text, I want to preach today on this subject: “God Bless America.” For we must confess with a troubled heart that America has forgotten God. And, the nation that was born in 1776 on July 4th must soon be born again or we’re going to join the graveyard of the nations. And America, as we know her now, is tottering on the brink of destruction. So, I want us to look at this psalm, and I want us to see the way for America, because I believe, bless God, there is a way for America.

I. A Glorious National Design

The very first thing I want you to notice as we consider the nation Israel and then make the application to America is this: I want you to see that there had been a glorious national design. Look, if you will, in verse 8 of this psalm: *“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: [and] thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like goodly cedars. She sent [forth] her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river”* (Psalm 80:8–11). Now, God calls the nation Israel a vine, and the vine was the symbol of Israel. And, God is now speaking of His ancient people as though they were a vine, and I want you to see what God did for that vine.

A. She was Divinely Planted

First of all, like a vine, Israel was planted. Look again in verse 8: *“Thou hast brought [forth] a vine out of Egypt: [and] thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it”* (Psalm

80:8). Israel was a nation that God planted, and I have a firm conviction that this nation was a nation that God has planted. No nation ever had such a Christian beginning as did America. I do not believe that America came into being by happenstance; I believe that America is here by the will and the plan of God, and I believe that it was God Himself who placed that great American dream in the bosom of our Founding Fathers.

And, as you read history, you can find that the original colonies were founded because of the Christian faith. The Pilgrims, when they came in 1620, came seeking spiritual and religious freedom and liberty. And, the Mayflower Compact, drawn up by those people who sailed on that little Mayflower, begins with these words: “In the name of God, amen.” And, they wrote in that Mayflower Compact that the express purpose of their coming was—and I quote: “For the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith.” That’s why they came: “For the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith.”

A South American President was speaking with the great economist Roger Babson and said, “What is the difference between North America and South America? They both have fertile lands. They both have strong people. Why has God so blessed America?” And, Roger Babson said, “I’ll tell you why: the people who came to South America came because they were seeking gold; the people who came to North America came because they were seeking God, and that is the difference.” You see, here is a nation that has a spiritual heritage. And so, as you look at our American government, and as you read the Constitution of the United States of America, and as you’re aware of the Declaration of Independence, you can find that spiritual heritage. It’s all the way through it.

On that day when they declared themselves independent of England and a people of their own in that Declaration of Independence, we began with the Preamble that says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men...are endowed by their”—what’s that next word? Let’s say it again—“by their...by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” These rights don’t come from the government. Dear friend, the government doesn’t give us these rights. God has given us these rights. The government is here to recognize and to protect the rights that Almighty God has given. And, these Founding Fathers evidently didn’t believe in evolution because they spoke of a Creator, and they realized that the rights and the liberties that we hold come from God. And, the Bill of Rights, therefore, that is written into our Constitution, for example, never meant that children should be prohibited from praying in school. Don’t you believe it, dear friend. No, that’s not what the Bill of Rights means. It means that the government shall not keep any one from praying. It means, dear friend, that the government shall not force any one to pray. But, a red-blooded Christian American has a right to pray any time, any place, anywhere with any body. And, that’s one of the rights that’s written into the

Constitution of the United States of America. Our government is founded, dear friend, by a belief in God.

And, as we study the great leaders of our nation, we can find out that these, for the most part, were devout men. And, when that little rag-tag Continental Army was fighting against the British and those Hessian mercenaries, General George Washington went out to kneel in the snow at Valley Forge and to pray for his army. When a stranger came there to that Continental Congress and wanted to know which one was George Washington, a friend said, “When the Congress begins to pray, Washington will be the tall man who will go to his knees when the Congress begins to pray.”

He was succeeded by Abraham Lincoln, and President-elect Abraham Lincoln said this—and I quote: “I...leave [now], not knowing when or whether ever I [shall] return, with a task before me greater than that which rested [on the shoulders of] Washington”—and then, Lincoln said this—“Without the assistance of [the] Divine Being [who] attended him I can not succeed. With that [assurance], I can not fail.” That’s what made Lincoln the great man that he was.

And, Thomas Jefferson clearly wrote, “The God [that] gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.” And, that’s the reason that Tommy Lane can lead us in these great songs—because we see in our national anthem and we see in our national hymn the spirit of our country. “The Star-Spangled Banner” says:

*Blest with vict’ry and [praise], may the Heav’n rescued [nation]
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: “In God is our trust”*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

And, don’t you let the atheists, and the humanists, and the agnostic, and the libertine tell you that we, as Christian Americans, and we, in our Judeo-Christian heritage, cannot have a firm belief in God. And, those Framers of the Constitution and those who have adopted our national anthem always understood the principle of the separation of Church and State, but they never meant for one scintilla of an iota of a half a second for us to believe in the separation of God and government. They knew, as you know and as I know and everybody ought to know—“*blessed is [that] nation whose God is the LORD*” (Psalm 33:12). That’s the reason we sing our national hymn:

*[America,] our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom’s holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

Great God our King
—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

We believe that. We should still believe it.

B. She was Divinely Protected

Now, I want to say, therefore, that like history, I believe that America was divinely planted. But, not only was she divinely planted; she was divinely protected. Look, if you will, in verse 9 of this psalm: *“Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root”* (Psalm 80:9). When Israel was a fledgling nation, when Israel came out of the land of Egypt, God watched over that little nation. God hovered over that vine. God made room for that vine. God put His protection above it. God caused it to take root. And, I believe, the same way, God has blessed America, and we have sung it and meant it: *“Protect us by Thy might, / Great God our King”* (Samuel Francis Smith). For America has been protected.

You think about how good God has been to this nation in this war-torn world. I tell you, I have lived these many years without knowing enemy bombs to fall on our shores as they have on other places. Think of what’s happening in Beirut, Lebanon, today. How our hearts ought to go out for the dear Arab people who are suffering, and how we ought to pray for wisdom for these people! Think of what’s happened in England. Think of what’s happened in France. Think of what’s happened in Germany. Think what’s happened in Italy. Think what has happened in Japan. Think what has happened in Russia. Think what has happened in Korea. Think what has happened in Vietnam. Thank God you’re an American. God has not only planted this nation; God has protected this nation.

C. She was Divinely Productive

But, not only was Israel divinely planted, and not only was she divinely protected; she was divinely productive. Look again, if you will, at this chapter in verse 11: *“She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river”* (Psalm 80:11). What does he mean by that? Here was a fruitful, a bounteous, vine.

God so blessed them with material blessings because they had learned certain things. The prophets of Ancient Israel taught honesty, morality, the right of the ownership of personal property. They taught, as God had thundered forth from Sinai, *“Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery”* (Exodus 20:13–15). And, they believed God and obeyed God, and because of this, they were materially blessed. For the Bible says God *“[taketh] pleasure in the prosperity of his [servants]”* (Psalm 35:27). And, what a prosperous nation was the nation Israel, and what a prosperous nation has been America, the richest nation on the face of this earth! Why? Because we are smarter? Because the sun shines more here? Because the rain

falls more here? Because we're stronger? No—but because God has blessed us. These are blessings that have come from God. *“Blessed is [that] nation whose God is the LORD”* (Psalm 33:12).

I want to tell you that when God planted the nation Israel, He had a glorious national design, and when God planted the nation America, I believe, correspondingly, He had a grand national design. And, the rich people—excuse me, the poor people—in America are rich compared to most of the people on the face of this earth, and that doesn't mean that we ought not to continue to help and undergird the poor, for indeed, we should.

II. A Grave National Danger

But, I want you to notice something else: not only, dear friend, was there a glorious national design, but there was a grave national danger.

A. External Danger

Notice here as we continue to read this psalm. I want you to begin reading now in verse 12: *“Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?”* (Psalm 80:12). The psalmist said, “Lord, You—You—planted this vine. Lord, You protected this vine. Lord, You caused this vine to be so productive.” Now, he says in Psalm 80, verse 12: *“Why [then, Lord, have You] broken down [our] hedges, so that all they which pass by...do pluck her?”* (Psalm 80:12). That is, no longer was Israel defended; no longer had God put a hedge around about His people. And, these godless, heathen nations would come by and pluck the fruit from this vine. Now, there was a danger, therefore, and there was a danger from external forces—there was an external danger. Those that came by would pluck her fruit.

Now, correspondingly, just as the heathen powers loomed against Israel, there are godless and heathen powers that come against America today. It is perhaps passé; it is perhaps not in style—not in vogue today—to preach against communism. But, I want to tell you, dear friend, this is a generation that still needs to be warned against the menace of communism, and I am sorry for our young people in our colleges and in our high schools—in our universities—who are not learning what communism is all about.

You say, “Well, Adrian Rogers, who are you? You don't know so much.” Let me tell you what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had to say, the leading intellectual in Russia—Nobel Prize winning author. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who spent many years in Siberian prison camps, came out of Russia, came to Britain, got on the BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation Network). He appeared for an hour-long interview, and this is what he said—this man who spent 11 years in a Siberian prison camp. Solzhenitsyn gave a stirring speech. Every American ought to hear it and read it, and he concluded that the entire West is on the verge of total collapse. He says it will come, and it will come

quickly, even as it did in the south, in Southeast Asia—and he said it will come soon. Now listen, he said it will come—it will come quickly, and it will come soon. And, Solzhenitsyn said to those people who would listen that communism has not changed one iota from the day it was born. He pointed out that it has shifted its strategy a thousand times, but its goal has never been changed. And, the communists have all kinds of strategy, but they have one goal, and it is for world dominion.

In 1924, communism's chief architect stated his plan. Lenin said this: "First we shall take Eastern Europe"—they've done that—"Then we shall take the masses of Asia"—they've done that—"Finally, we shall surround America, the last bastion of capitalism"—they have done that—"And we shall not have to fight. It will fall off into our hands like a piece of over-ripe fruit." That's what Lenin said, and you can pick up your newspapers and read the history books and see what has happened. Solzhenitsyn pointed out that Americans are a gullible people. He says, "You've forgotten the words of Lenin." Do you know what Lenin said to his followers? "There must be no relationship between our diplomacy and our action." Do you know what he's saying? He said, "What we do on the diplomatic front is not related to what our final goals are; there is no relationship between our diplomacy and our action."

You say, "Well, what's so wrong if we become communist?" Communism is unspeakably immoral because communism is built on the premise that there is no God—that "religion is the opiate of the people" (Karl Marx). And, since there is no God, there's no absolute standard of right or wrong; and so, therefore, we cannot say empirically, and finally, and ultimately, "This is right, and this is wrong." For communism, whatever is right is that which furthers communism. For communism, whatever is wrong is that which furthers capitalism. And so, if it furthers communism to lie, they will lie with a good conscience. If it furthers communism to be kind, they will be kind. If it furthers communism to murder, they will murder. If it furthers communism to feed the poor, they will feed the poor. They will do whatever is necessary with no compunction of conscience because they believe in no God. The god is the State; the goal is world dominion. And, it is time that we woke up. Just as Israel had a national danger from without, so do we. There was an external danger.

B. Internal Danger

But, not only was there an external danger; there was also an internal danger. Look in verse 13: "*The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it*" (Psalm 80:13). Now, not only outside this field, but inside this field there were some things that were corrupting the vine. Not only were those who were passing by plucking this nation, but there were certain inside that God describes as a boar and as a wild animal—a wild beast of the field—devouring this vine. Wild hogs wanted to root up

God's vine.

And so, in America, there are those dissidents within our nation who would like to root up this nation, and we see an avalanche of sin and rebellion. America has become so immoral, and so corrupt, and so vile that God is surely going to judge us. We've had more opportunities for godliness than any other nation, but look what we've done with it. Did you know in America that we have more police per capita than any other nation on the face...in the world, and yet we have more crime? And, the vileness of our motion pictures is unbelievable. Television is going the same way. There's crime, immorality, the breakup of the home, a total disregard for the things of God. You can pick up any newspaper and read a tidal wave of crookedness, lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, divorce, murder, lust, crime, vice—as we've been reading in the news lately, even in our nation's capital, among our Congress. My, how it ought to break our hearts! And, there are those, like a wild hog, who would root out this vine. I think it's time that we rose up and told those people to go to heaven and start, dear friend, to speak for the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. **Eternal Danger**

But, not only was there external danger, and not only was there internal danger; there was eternal danger. Look, if you will, in verse 14: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself”*—now, watch verse 16—*“It is burned with fire”*—well, who burned it with fire?—*“it is cut down”*—well, who cut it down?—*“they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance”* (Psalm 80:14–16). Did you know, dear friend, that God Himself turned against them? And, God's judgment was like an ax laid to the root of the vine, and God's judgment was like a faggot of fire. *“It is cut down. It is burned at the rebuke of Thy countenance”* (Psalm 80:16). Not only was there an external danger, not only was there an internal danger; there was an eternal danger, as God Himself came against that nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, listen to me: not only is God our only hope; God is our biggest threat. I am not nearly so afraid of what the communists may do to us as what God may do to us. Here in this verse it is God that has the ax. In this verse—verse 16 (Psalm 80:16)—it is God that has the torch. You see, here was a nation, dear friend, that had turned on God. And, they turned their back on God, and now they were facing the judgment of Almighty God. And, our nation is under the wrath of Almighty God. Now, there was an eternal danger, and I believe America's in that eternal danger. I believe that God is getting ready to lay the ax to the root of the tree. I believe that God is getting ready to set our nation aflame in judgment if we don't get right with God. And, as somebody has well said, “Even now the raging waters of God's wrath are furiously

pounding against the dam of His mercy.”

III. A Great National Despair

But, I want you to notice a third thing: not only was there a glorious national design, not only was there a grave national danger, but I want you to see there was a great national despair. Here was a nation in despair because of its danger. Look, if you will now, in verses 4 and following—Psalm 80, verse 4: “O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the [prayers] of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves” (Psalm 80:4–6). Why was there a great national despair? Three reasons:

A. Spiritual Sterility

Number one: because of spiritual sterility. Look again at verse 4—look at it—one of the most frightening verses in all of the Bible: “O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the [prayers] of thy people?” (Psalm 80:4). Here’s what was happening in Israel: they were praying; they were saying, “God, deliver us. God, have mercy. God, send a revival. God, bless Israel.” And, what did that do? It made God angry.

Did you know that when you stand and sing, this morning, “God Bless America,” you may anger God? Did you know that when you pray and say, “God, send us a revival,” you may anger God? You say, “Now, wait a minute, pastor. You’re really getting me confused here this morning. I thought prayer was good and singing good.” Yes, but let me tell you something, friend: *the prayers of an un-repentent people are a stench in the nostrils of God*. Do you know what was wrong with these people? They were praying, but they were not willing to turn from their sin. They were holding on to their sin. They were going on in their wickedness, and yet they were praying at the same time, “O God, send us a revival.” And, my dear friends, such is an insult to Almighty God—to pray to God, on the one hand, and yet to hold to your sins, on the other hand. And so, the psalmist said, “LORD...how long wilt thou be angry [at] the [prayers] of thy people?” (Psalm 80:4).

Do you know what’s wrong in America today? Friend, we’re praying without repenting. Remember when Joshua, as Israel was defeated there after the Battle of Jericho... Joshua’s on his face, and God said to Joshua, “Joshua, why are you lying there on your face? Get up. Israel has sinned.” That is, “Joshua, prayer is not some sort of a smokescreen that you can hide your sin in.” There’s no substitute for repentance. Do you know the one thing that America has forgotten to do and will never be blessed until she does? We must repent—we must repent. And, until we repent, there’ll be no revival. Our prayers, rather than God hearing our prayers, will only increase our

judgment. You sing today, “God Bless America,” and yet there’s filthy sin in your heart. You pray for revival, and yet you yourself are not willing to turn from your sin. My dear friend, all you’re doing is increasing the judgment.

There was a sterility in their religion. They prayed, but God would not hear their prayers. *Religion without righteousness is repugnant to God.* The cesspools of iniquity overflow in America, and it’s not going to do us any good as a nation to spend six days a week sowing wild oats and then come to church on Sunday and pray for crop failure. That’s what we’re doing. We’re saying, “God bless America,” and yet we refuse to repent. “Well,” you say, “I hope they repent.” Friend, I hope we repent, and I hope you repent; and I hope I repent. America’s no better than I am, you are, we are. If you want to know what’s wrong with America, go look in the mirror. And, dear friend, we need to get right with God, and we need to repent. And, why was there this despair? Number one: spiritual sterility.

B. Personal Sorrow

Number two: personal sorrow. Look, if you will, in verse 5 of this same psalm: *“Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure”* (Psalm 80:5). Here was a nation that had been baptized in salty tears. Why? Because sin—excuse me, because sorrow—follows sin like night follows day. Friend, we seek peace, but we’ll not have peace until we have a conference with the Prince of Peace. For the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 29, verse 2: *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn”* (Proverbs 29:2). I wonder, will an ocean of tears, rivers of blood, be the price that we’ll pay for our sins? We look all around us—the calamity, the sorrow, the heartache, the tears, the confusion. Why? Because we’ve refused to repent.

C. National Shame

But, not only was there spiritual sterility in verse 4 (Psalm 80:4), not only was there personal sorrow in verse 5 (Psalm 80:5); there was national shame in verse 6 (Psalm 80:6). Look at verse 6, and see if it doesn’t break your heart: *“Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves”* (Psalm 80:6). Now, these were the people of God. This was a nation that God chose. This was a nation that God planted. This was a nation that God protected. This was a nation that God caused to produce. And yet, the heathen—the godless heathen—looked at them and laughed.

You say, “Is there a correspondence?” I’ll say there is. Friend, there was a time when to be an American was to be somebody. There was a time when the “Yank” was a good guy. There was a time when people may not have always agreed with this nation, but I can tell you that most of the people on the face of this earth respected this nation. They respected America, and they knew that America was the greatest nation on the

face of the earth—not because of the American himself, but there was something special about America, that God was blessing this America. And, I want to tell you today our nation has become the laughing stock of the nations. And, the godless heathen look at so-called “God-blessed America,” and they don’t believe in our God because of the way that we live. And, the scream of the great American eagle has become but the frightened twitter of a little sparrow. What’s happened to us? Spiritual sterility, personal sorrow, national shame.

IV. A Gracious National Deliverance

Let me finish the message, however. Not only was there a glorious national design, not only did there arise grave national danger, not only was there great national despair, but friend, there was a prayer for a gracious national deliverance.

I want you to see how this psalmist taught us to pray for national revival. Look, if you will, in verse 14. Here’s the kind of prayer that doesn’t anger God; here’s the kind of prayer that God will bless. Listen to it. Here’s the gracious national deliverance that we need: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved”* (Psalm 80:14–19). Now, here is the glorious national deliverance that God had promised Israel. And, I believe the principles are still true today, and I believe this is the formula for God blessing America.

A. We Must Look Up

First of all, we must look up. Look in verse 14: *“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven”* (Psalm 80:14). Now, how does a man pray when he is asking God to look down? He looks up. He says, “Return, God; we need You. Lord, look down upon us. God, come down upon us.” Today, America must look to God. The Pentagon cannot save us. Ronald Reagan cannot save us. Economics cannot save us. The politicians cannot save us. The educators cannot save us. Only God can save America. Now, you may not believe that, but I want to tell you, I believe it as sure as I’m standing here. The only thing—the only hope—for America is a spiritual revival. Without a spiritual revival there is no hope for our nation. We must look up. We must return to God so God will return us. What time is it in America? It is knee time; it is time to be on our knees—yea, time to be on our face before an Almighty God.

But, God is still a God of mercy, and just as the psalmist recognized that God can

make His face to shine upon Israel one more time, I want to tell you that God can make His face to shine upon America one more time. And, I am an optimist, and I'm going to tell you something else: not only am I praying for revival; I'm looking for revival—and not only that; I'm expecting revival. And, I believe I am seeing it—the seeds of revival. I believe that God is getting ready to bless America—and I honestly believe it. I said I honestly believe the only hope is revival, but I believe that revival is on the way. As a matter of fact, I was talking to my friend, Jack Taylor, the other day, and he said, “God has given me the liberty everywhere I go now to tell people it is coming.” He said, “I've just... God has spoken to my heart...and just to tell them it is coming.” I say, “Hallelujah for that!” Dear friend, first of all, we should look up—in verse 14 (Psalm 80:14).

B. We Must Confess Up

And, verses 15 and 16 (Psalm 80:15–16)—we should confess up, because those verses tell us that God has turned Himself against us because of our sin. And, there's no way to deal with our sin except to confess our sin. For the Bible says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanse us...”* (1 John 1:9). And, my dear friend, not only must we confess our personal sin; we must confess our national sin. Do you know one of America's national sins is abortion? That's a good time to say, “Amen.” Abortion—the slaughter of the innocence. Over one million precious babies will be murdered in America this year, and we must get down on our face in sackcloth and ashes and say, “God, we confess this as a sin.” You say, “Well, I didn't have anything to do with it.” The Bible says, *“[Blessed] is [the man] that condemneth not himself in [the] thing which he alloweth”* (Romans 14:22). And we, as a nation, have allowed it to go on, and we must put a stop to it. And, my dear friend, not only must we look up; we must confess up.

C. We Must Speak Up

But, not only must we look up and confess up; then, we must speak up. Look, if you will, in verse 17: *“Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself”* (Psalm 80:17). God puts His hand upon us. God anoints us. God gives us strength, and when God does, He said, “I made you strong to be strong for Me.” And, may God help us as men of God, as women of God, not only to look up, not only to confess up, but then, dear friend, to speak up.

The German pastor Martin Neimöller was one of the outstanding Protestant scholars in Europe during World War II when the Nazis took over. Neimöller was put in a Nazi concentration camp. Later on, this is what he said: he said that when the Nazis got started, they came for the communists first. But, he said, “I wasn't a communist, so I didn't speak up.” Then, he said, “They came for the Jews, but,” he said, “I wasn't a Jew, so I didn't speak up.” Then, he said, “They came for trade unionists, but,” he said, “I

wasn't in a trade union, so I didn't speak up." Then, he said, "They came for the Catholics, but," he said, "I wasn't a Catholic, so I didn't speak up." Then, he said, "They came for me, and by that time there was nobody left to speak up for anybody about anything."

Are you going to speak up? How many of you are registered to vote? How many of you know what the issues are? How many of you are letting your voice be heard against dope, and pornography, and perversion, and the murder of the innocents? How many of you are for honesty and righteousness and decency, and get informed and say so, and go to the polls and vote as you ought to vote? Dear friend, I want to tell you that "whatever makes you a good Christian makes you a good citizen at the same time"—said Webster, and he was so right. And, I want to tell you, dear friend, that it is Satan's strategy to keep good men silent in evil times. We must speak.

Let me tell you something: I believe in armaments—and I do. I'm not one of those softheads who thinks that we ought to just disarm and hope the communists will. I don't believe in that. But, I want to tell you something, friend: communism is an idea, and you cannot kill an idea with a bomb; you cannot shoot down an idea with a bullet. And, the only thing that can kill an idea is a better idea. And, what we have, dear friend, is the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, the great thing that America has to export is not, primarily, democracy or republicanism, but it is the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and our Judeo-Christian heritage, and the Ten Commandments, and the things that made this country great. And, if we refuse to speak up, if we refuse to let it be known, then, dear friend, we are going to die ignominiously as a nation.

D. We Must Stand Up

We must look up. We must confess up. We must speak up, and we must stand up. Notice, if you will, in verse 18: "*So will not we go back from thee*" (Psalm 80:18). Have you made up your mind—"I'm going to get right and stay right"? I have. I know I'm weak; I know I need help. But friend, I'm going for God. And, it's too late to turn back; the price is too high. I think of my children. I think of our grandchildren. I think of this nation that ought to be a mighty force for the preaching of the gospel and the sending out of missionaries. And, I say, "I want to look up. I want to confess up. I want to speak up, and I want to stand up and not go back."

You say, "Well, we don't have very many." Friend, we don't need very many. Castro took Cuba with a band of 80 cutthroats. Lenin took Russia with a few thousand people. Jesus started with only 12 disciples. I'm only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do, I ought to do; and what I ought to do, that, by the grace of God, I will do. And, that's what you need to say: "What I can do—I may

be just one person, but I am not only going to speak up; I'm going to stand up, and I don't care if we're not in the majority." Joshua 23, verse 10: "*One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is [who] fighteth for you, as he hath promised*" (Joshua 23:10). Oh, dear friend, we need for God to bless America.

Conclusion

Last week, I was in Washington. I took my lovely wife, Joyce, with me. I had some business to attend to. We went out to dinner. It was a beautiful summer night. We were one block from our nation's capital. Hand in hand we walked up to the Capitol building, the dome of that building bathed in light. We walked through those beautiful grounds, walked up those steps, and sat on the steps of our nation's Capitol. We held hands. We bowed our heads. We prayed for America, and then we sang, "God Bless America."

A Miracle for America

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 30, 1996

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 85

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

PSALMS 85:6

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Source of True Revival
- II. The Subjects of True Revival
 - A. The People God Has
 - B. The Pride God Hates
 - C. The Prayer God Hears
 - D. The Promise God Honors
- III. The Sequence of Revival
 - A. Repentance
 - B. Rejoicing
 - C. Reaping

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you be finding, please, in the Bible Psalm 85. And, when you have found it, please let me have your attention. Psalm 85. My heart is heavy for America, because the dream, the great American dream, that was put into the hearts of our Founding Fathers is very close to becoming a national nightmare. And, I want to tell you why. America is still number one, but unfortunately, she is number one in radical feminism, divorce, the destruction of family values, sexual perversion, political correctness, occult humanistic spirituality of New Age religion. Yes, we're number one, all right. And, I wonder, what is the legacy that we're going to leave to our children? Is it going to be wealth? Is the issue really the economy, stupid? Is that the issue, or is the issue something far greater than that? I, for one, had rather leave to my children a legacy of holiness and righteousness and godliness than to leave great wealth to be squandered in a godless, permissive society. We are on the verge of national collapse, but I want to show you from the Word of God that there is hope.

Many of us not very many years ago rejoiced when the Berlin Wall came down, and then, when Soviet Communism imploded upon itself, we said, "Praise God. This is

wonderful. We're on the threshold of something new and wonderful." But, I ask you a question. Do you feel safer today than you did before the collapse of communism? Now, communism was unspeakably immoral, but our problem is that when the demon of communism went out, America did not turn to God; we turned from theology to *me-ology*, and we have put "In God we trust" on our money, but "Me first" in our hearts, and communism has been replaced with seven more deadly demons.

Now, we're in need of revival. We need a miracle. Read about it in Psalm 85: "*Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.*" *Selah* means, "consider that; meditate on that; think about that." "*Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.*" Now, the Psalmist is looking back. He looks back to God's blessing, what God had once done for the nation Israel, but had Israel followed God? Had they loved God and served God because of His goodness? No. They turned away from God. And now, the Psalmist is praying for a national revival. Listen to it. Verse 4: "*Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*" That's the key verse. Put a star by it or underline it. "*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land...*"—underscore that phrase, "*that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps*" (Psalm 85:1–13).

Now, the Psalmist starts out in these first several verses, in verses 1 through 3, and he talks about what God had done for the people in the past. And, fathers, let me say a word to you, all you dads, and also to you mothers. We live in a generation that does not understand the spiritual heritage that we are enjoying today, and it is up to you parents to give to your children a history lesson. They're not going to get it in school. You're going to have to check out some books out of our church library, get them from our bookstore, do some research on your own, get some copies of this message, make notes of it, to help your children and this generation that is alive right now to understand our spiritual roots, to understand how our nation was born and why we enjoy the liberties and the blessings that we have today, because we're only one generation away from paganism.

Now, people say, “Well, I’m not going to force my beliefs on my children. I’m just going to let them grow up when they’re old enough to choose their own way.” Well, you may not be giving your beliefs to your children, but I want to assure you that the world, the teachers, their companions, and the media are altogether molding their plastic mentalities.

As a matter of fact, let me read to you what one humanist had to say not so very long ago about your child. Quote: “Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill.” Did you catch that? “Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill.” Now why would a humanist educator say that? And incidentally, this was taken from a childhood education seminar by a professor of educational psychiatry at Harvard University. Now, listen to this: “Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill, because he comes to school with certain allegiances toward our Founding Fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being, toward the sovereignty of his nation as a separate entity.” He’s mentally ill, therefore, because he believes in the heritage and the history of our country, because he believes in his mom and dad, because he believes in God. And then, this educator went on to say, “It is up to you teachers...” Now, notice here’s one teacher, one educator, talking to others. “It is up to you teachers to make all these sick children well by creating the international child of the future.” And yet, so many of us say, “Well, I’m not going to influence my children.”

Well, what is America’s spiritual heritage? The first three verses told about Israel’s spiritual heritage. What is America’s spiritual heritage? On July the 4th, 1776, there was signed in the city of Philadelphia a Declaration of Independence. And, that marked the birth of this nation, which under God was destined to world leadership. But, what we often forget, and what I want to remind my brothers and sisters about today, is that the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain was at the same time a Declaration of Dependence upon Almighty God. Now, many of us have forgotten that, but I want you to listen to how this Declaration begins and how it ends.

It begins this way: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” Now, that’s very interesting. That’s self-evident. They believed in a Creator; they believed in God. Did you know that we cannot teach creation in our schools today? But, they said, “It would be ridiculous to deny it. That’s self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” But now, listen to the closing words of the Declaration of Independence. Listen to these closing words. The Declaration closes this way: “with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.” Freedom from Great Britain; dependence upon Almighty God. “With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our Sacred

Honor.” At the same time, in the same document, they said, “We will throw off the tyranny of Great Britain, and we will bow the knee and humble our hearts and depend upon the protection of Almighty God.”

Now, folks, we’ve gotten away from that. But, let’s remember again just for a moment about our national heritage and our history. In 1778, James Madison, who was the architect of the federal Constitution and also the fourth President of the United States of America, said this: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God,” which Ten Commandments have been taken down from the classroom walls. But, James Madison, the architect of the Constitution, the President of the United States, said, “We have staked it all upon this.” You see, it’s not so much that God chose America as it is that Americans chose God. That’s what’s made the difference in our nation.

On April the 30th, 1789, George Washington, the father of our country, said this in his first inauguration address—listen to it: “My fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.” He went on to say, “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.” George Washington did not believe in the separation of God and government.

In 1820, the great Daniel Webster said—quote: “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.” That was Daniel Webster; that was 1820.

On July the 4th, 1821, the great John Quincy Adams said this—quote: “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this.” Well, would you like to know what it is—the highest glory of the American Revolution? Now, this is an important person who’s saying this: John Quincy Adams. “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” That’s what he said. He said that’s the highest glory. And then, he went on to say, “From the day of the Declaration...they”—that is, the American people—“were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.” You see, we’ve forgotten our history. Our children don’t know this.

On June the 8th, 1845, President Andrew Jackson said the Bible is “the rock upon which our Republic rests.” In 1913, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, said, “America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from...the Holy Scriptures.” In March 1931, the United States Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. And, I remind you that the fourth stanza says,

*Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: “In God is our trust.”*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

I wonder if the ACLU can read.

In 1952, the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said—this is a Supreme Court justice now: “We are a religious people and our institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” In June 1954, Congress adopted this phrase—quote—“under God,” to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance: “One nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.” In July 1956, by joint resolution, Congress adopted a bill providing that the national motto of the United States of America is this: “In God We Trust.”

Folks, we have some revisionists today who are trying to move us away from our national history. Our spiritual heritage, therefore, is seen in the national anthem and the national hymn. Our national hymn says,

*Our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom’s holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

—now, here’s one for you—

Great God our King.
—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Not only did they realize that America has a President, but America has a King: “Great God our King.”

Now, Americans believe in the separation of church and state, rightly understood, if you mean that there’s to be no national church. I’d be as much afraid of a Baptist Pope as any other kind. We’re not trying to have some nationally supported religion. God, be it far, far from us! But, Americans never for one iota of a scintilla of a second, the Founding Fathers never believed in the separation of God and government.

And so, we must look back and see that we have a national heritage that is

wonderful. But, I must tell you today with a broken heart that America is sick, because she has forgotten God, and there's a striking parallel between Israel of old and America today. Israel forgot God, and judgment came to Israel. We're no better than they, and if we forget God, we're going to see the judgment of God. Yea, indeed we are seeing it. People say, "Is God going to judge America?" Look around. God is judging America. We see the erosion of moral values, sexual permissiveness, the parading of perversion, the continued disposal of unwanted children, the breakup of the family, the consuming obsession with self and material goods, an explosion of crime. There are 100 times less burglaries in so-called pagan Japan than there are in Christian America. Our nation is perfumed with an aroma of religion, but it's only formaldehyde disguising decay of a rotting corpse of a once-great nation.

I think this is symbolized more than anything else by the horror of abortion. If you wanted one thing that would epitomize and tell how far we've gone as a nation in the wrong way, it would be abortion. It's the clearest indication that we're moving in the direction of a secular state with arbitrary morality because of the devaluation of human life. Roe vs. Wade in 1972 was tragic, because what the Supreme Court did was to redefine personhood, to say that the little baby in its mother's womb is not a person. That's what Hitler did. Hitler redefined personhood so that the Jews would be excluded from the protection of the law. And, I can hear a Nazi saying, "It's nobody else's business what I do in my own personal crematorium, what I do in my own personal gas chamber. It's nobody else's business, because after all, these Jews, they're not real people. They are non-persons."

Now, I am aware that there will be some people, maybe some here today, who won't like it when I speak against abortion. I can't help that. If I make you angry, you come up and apologize to me after this service, and I'll forgive you. You know, it's an amazing thing, when a preacher has a word to say about the merciless killing of the unborn—and now, God help us, the partially born—when a minister will say something, they will say to him, "You stay out of politics." But, if you talk to the politician about abortion, he'll tell you, "Oh, that's a religious matter." Do you see what they've done? And, meanwhile, the babies die. This is not a matter of right or left; it's a matter of right or wrong. It's wrong to kill little babies. It is wrong.

Some time ago, I read about a father who was in the delivery room when his little baby was born. He took that little baby and threw it against the delivery room wall and killed it. They arrested him for murder, and rightly they should have. But, irony of ironies, one day before, a doctor could be paid for doing the same thing, and remain an honorable doctor. Now, you explain that to me. You explain to me, dear friend, how a person can be fined 5,000 dollars for destroying the egg of a bald eagle, because they say there's a little potential eagle in that egg, and yet a little baby that is viable outside

its mother's womb can be killed inside its mother's womb, and a doctor be paid for doing the same thing. No, we are in desperate need—desperate need, desperate need—in America for revival.

Now, let's go back to our text and look at it. The Psalmist remembers what God had done, and now here is the prayer of a patriot. Listen to it in verse 4: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:4–6). Several things I want you to notice with me out of that verse—particularly verse 6.

I. The Source of True Revival

I want you to notice the source of true revival. *“Wilt thou not revive us again...?”* To whom does the Psalmist look? He does not look to government. He looks to God. Learn this about government. Government cannot make us good. It doesn't matter whom we elect if we don't turn to God. Government cannot make us good. It's not the purpose of government. Read the Book of Romans, Romans chapter 13, and you'll find out that government is here to restrain evil (Romans 13:1–7).

People say you can't legislate morality. Well, be careful here, because in a sense they're right. You can't legislate morality if you're saying, “I'm going to make laws that will help people to love and to give and to be peaceful and joyful and altruistic.” No. There's not a law on Earth that can make you love me, so we must legislate against immorality. You can't legislate morality. Legislation is against immorality. Do you understand what I'm saying? You see, there's not a law on Earth that can make you love me, so I have to have one to keep you from killing me. The government is not here to make us good. Only God can make us good. The government is here to restrain evil. And, what was the ideal that our Founding Fathers had? It was this: a free church in a free state—so the government will do what it alone can do, so that the church can do what it alone can do. We need to look to God. God is our only hope, but God is our biggest threat. God is our only hope, and God is our biggest threat.

Now, some people have given up. Some people have said, “We've passed the point of no return. There's no hope for America.” So, all they've done is throw up their hands, hunker down, go to the video store and rent old movies, sit at home, and just simply wait for it all to disintegrate. We can't afford to do that. Friend, we must disabuse ourselves of the idea that it is too late for America. It is not too late for America, because there is a God in the glory.

Now, remember this: we must look to God. God is the God who can send revival to this nation. And I want to say this. Our hope is not in Washington. And, we as Bible-believing Christians need to be very careful that we don't identify ourselves with any

political party, whether they be Democrat, Republican, or any other political party. We need to find out what party, what platform, what plank, lines up with the Word of God, and then line up with that. We need to stay aloof enough to tell both parties to repent. We need to pray. I'm not saying we should not be politically involved. You get involved in the party that you feel is the very best. But, I'm telling you, folks, that our hope is not in Washington; our hope is in Heaven. "Wilt thou not revive thy people again?"

Now, that's the source of this revival: Almighty God. And, as long as there's a God in the glory, there's hope. And, don't you dare insult God by saying we cannot have revival. If you'll study the history of revival, you'll find out that God has sent revival in the darkest of days before.

II. The Subjects of True Revival

Here's the second thing I want you to notice: not only the source of true revival, but I want you to notice the subjects of true revival. "*Wilt thou not revive us...*"—look at it—"*revive us again...*?" (Psalm 85:6). Who's he speaking of? The people of God. It's not the world that needs a revival. You can't revive something that's dead. He's talking about the people of God. It's not the unsaved; it's the people of God.

Now, God gave a promise to His ancient people, and it's a promise of revival. And, we're not twisting or distorting the Scriptures when we take 2 Chronicles 7:14 and apply that to our day and our age. Listen to what it says: "*If my people,*"—if my people—"*which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*"

A. The People God Has

Take that verse now and break it down. Remember we're talking about the subjects of revival. "*Wilt thou not revive us?*" The people God has: "*If my people*"—"If my people." He's talking about the folks in this building. We say the problem is Hollywood. The problem is not Hollywood. We say the problem is the pornographer. The problem is not the pornographer. We say the problem is the dope pusher. The problem is not the dope pusher. We say the problem is the liquor dealer. The problem is not the liquor dealer. We say the problem is the Supreme Court. The problem is not the Supreme Court. You want to know where the problem is? Look around you. "*If my people...*" We say, "Oh, if only Hollywood. Oh, if only the government. Oh, if only the drug dealers. Oh, if only, if only." God says, "*If my people*"—"If my people." These are the people that God is looking to. The tragedy is that the situation is desperate, but the saints are not.

B. The Pride God Hates

Now, listen. God speaks of His people. The people God has. The pride God hates. God

says, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves...”* Now, that’s where the problem is. We’ve not yet humbled ourselves. We still strut. We still go on, on in our ways, but the Bible says that God resists the proud, but He gives grace unto the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). We ought to be on our face before God, but our resorts, our stadiums, are filled, our pleasure palaces are filled, the casinos are filled. But, God’s people go on their way. They may offer up a little prayer for revival every so often, but they do not humble themselves with fasting and prayer before God. We’re making some serious plans to call this congregation and this nation to humility by fasting and prayer.

C. The Prayer God Hears

Now, the people God has. The pride God hates. The prayer God hears. Listen to it: *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways...”* That’s the prayer that God hears. What is the prayer that God hears? God hears the prayer that seeks His face. Most of us are seeking God’s hand, not seeking God’s face. We’re asking God to do something. What is revival? Revival is when God turns His face toward us. Revival is the smile of God upon His people. We’re often asking, saying, “Oh, God, do something.” I’m praying, “Oh, God, don’t do it, don’t do it,” because if He does something, He’s going to judge us in more severity than He has yet. We need to seek the face of God.

And, how do you seek the face of God? Well, when you turn to God’s face, you turn from your sin. He says, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”*

D. The Promise God Honors

The people God has. The pride God hates. The prayer God hears. The promise God honors. “I will hear from heaven. I will forgive their sin. I will heal their land.” Don’t you tell me we can’t have revival. You’ll have to cut that verse out of the Bible.

III. The Sequence of Revival

Now, here’s the final thing I want to say to you this morning. I want you to think not only about the source of revival, and I want you to think not only about the subjects of revival, but I want you to think with me about the sequence of revival. How does true revival come?

A. Repentance

May I tell you what it is, how it comes? I’ve already alluded to it in 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14, but there must be a time of repenting. Look again in Psalm 85, verse 4: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation”* (Psalm 85:4). Turn us. Do you know what the word *turn* means? It

means to repent. We're going in the wrong direction. Real revival is a time of repentance. So many times we just simply pray as if God is going to hear our prayers, but we don't repent. Do you know what prayer without repentance does? Prayer without repentance angers Almighty God.

This morning I was reading early, and I read Psalm 80 and verse 3, and it kind of put a chill on me. It's an amazing thing. Listen to it: *"Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."* But now, look in verse 4. *"O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"* (Psalm 80:3–4). Did you know that the prayers of an unrepentant people anger God? Did you know that a prayer without repentance simply makes God angry? We can't use prayer as a smokescreen. I remember reading in the Bible about Joshua after Israel had failed ignominiously in a battle, and Joshua was on his face, and God said to Joshua, "Joshua, get up. Israel has sinned." Deal with that sin. Deal with that sin. You cannot use prayer as a smokescreen to hide your sin.

So, how does revival begin? Listen. What is the sequence? Repentance. You say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, I hope our nation will repent." No, you repent—you repent. You say, "I'm already saved." Friend, I've done a lot more repenting after I got saved than I ever did when I got saved. You repent.

B. Rejoicing

What is the sequence of revival? First of all, it is repentance. The second after repentance is rejoicing. Thank God for that. Go back to Psalm 85 and look at it. Look in verse 6 now: *"Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is near to them that fear him;"*—oh, and I love this statement right here—*"that glory may dwell in our land"* (Psalm 85:6–9).

I've got some little grandchildren. I love them with all of my heart. I think of Renae, a beautiful 16-year-old girl, got her first car. Oh, boy, she's just a lovely girl, bright and intelligent. I think of Angela, vivacious, beautiful, a free spirit. I think of little Rachel. We call her God's little lamb, just won a spelling bee over there, beat everybody! I mean, boy, she's good, little Rachel, in a spelling bee. I think of Rachel. I think of our newest little grandson, little Andrew, and as I've told you before, he's colossal. He's amazing. He's got the hands of a wide receiver. He's got the brow of a philosopher. He's got the heart of an evangelist. And, he's just a little newborn baby. It's amazing what you have. I think of Michael who lives over in Dallas, a sweet, gentle child, bright, handsome. I think of his little brother, Adrian, and Adrian, we keep our eyes on Adrian, because we never know what's wrapped up in that little fellow. He's amazing. And then, I've just been with my grandson whose father is a missionary in Spain, and little Jonathan, he's

just now in the first grade, but speaks fluently in two languages, both Spanish and English. I stand in awe. His granddaddy can't do that. They've got another little baby on the way.

Do you know what I want? I want a good land for these children. I don't want them to grow up in a world where fornication and adultery, sexual perversion, drug abuse, alcohol, blatant humanism, is all over. I don't want that. Do you want that for your grandchildren? Oh, I want God's glory to be in the land. I want there to be a revival, that God's people might rejoice in Him. I want my grandchildren to see God do something so glorious that Dan Rather can't explain it. I want to see revival in the land.

C. Reaping

What is revival? Revival is a time of repentance, and then it leads to a time of rejoicing, a burning, blazing, emotional, passionate love for Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, I'll tell you what else it is, and here's the sequence: repentance, rejoicing, and then reaping. Look in verses 11 and 12: *"Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps"* (Psalm 85:11–13).

The increase that he's talking about here is not primarily material. He's talking about a spiritual increase. He's talking about the time when we have revival, when the church gets right, when the saints get saved, when we believe God, when we follow God. We're going to see a great harvest of souls. We're going to see souls saved, not by the handful, but we're going to see an avalanche of revival and evangelism. We're going to come with arms filled with golden grain to lie at the feet of Jesus Christ. I'm longing for the time, I am praying for the time, I am looking for the time when literally millions and millions and millions of Americans, and people around the world, will be swept into the Kingdom of Heaven and come to know Prince Emmanuel, our Lord. Don't you want that?

Conclusion

Oh, my God, send revival to America! Oh, my God, have mercy upon us! Oh, my God, give us time, give us space, to repent! Let's have revival in America! If we can't have revival in America, let's have revival in the Mid-South. And, if we can't have revival in the Mid-South, let's have revival in Memphis. And, if we can't have revival in Memphis, let's have revival in Bellevue. And, if we can't have revival in Bellevue, let's have revival in your family. And, if we can't have revival in your family, let's just have revival in you. You get right with God. I'll get right with God. And, you get right with God. And, you get right with God. And, together we'll see God do something. I'm only one, but I am one. I

can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do, I ought to do. And, what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I will do. Let's say it, sing it, preach it, pray it, mean it: "God bless America." Let's pray in these desperate days that we'll have a spiritual awakening.

The America of Tomorrow

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 29, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 85: 1–4

“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.”

PSALMS 85:4

Outline

Introduction

I. The Source of Revival

II. The Subjects of Revival

A. The People That God Has

B. The Pride That God Hates

C. The Prayer That God Hears

D. The Promise That God Honors

III. The Sign of Revival

A. A Time of Weeping

B. A Time of Reaping

C. A Time of Rejoicing

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 85, and when you've found it, look up here. And, may I tell you without stutter or stammer, I still believe that America is the greatest nation on the face of the earth, and I make no apology, none whatsoever, for being a patriot and a flag-waving American. I'm not ashamed to stand at attention when Old Glory passes by. I still get a lump in my throat when we pledge allegiance to the flag. I'm not embarrassed by tears when I hear "The Star-Spangled Banner." America is a great nation.

Now, why is America such a great nation? Because of her natural resources? Other nations, other lands, have great natural resources. Is it because of Yankee ingenuity? Are Americans brighter, more intellectual, with more brainpower than other people? No. IQ spans the globe. It's about the same in every nation. Why is America the great nation that she is? Because God has blessed America—God has blessed America. We were reading this morning, Joyce and I, the scripture that says, "*Blessed is [that] nation whose God is the LORD*" (Psalm 33:12). I believe, sincerely believe, that the American dream was placed in the bosom of our Founding Fathers by Almighty God. No nation ever had such a Christian beginning as America has had. The original colonies were

founded because of the Christian faith.

The Pilgrims came to our shores in 1620 seeking religious liberty. These Pilgrims huddled beneath the deck of that little Mayflower ship that sailed here with those Pilgrims. They got beneath the deck and prayed, and they wrote together a covenant called The Mayflower Compact. Do you know how it began, the first words? “In the name of God, Amen.” That’s the way they started: “In the name of God, Amen.” And, then they said their stated purpose was “for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith.” That’s why they said they were coming: “for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith.”

Roger Babson was a great economist in yesteryear in America. He was talking with a South American president, and they were comparing the productivity, the wealth, the amenities, the felicities of America as compared to South America, and they were wondering why the difference, because South America has so much in natural resources, such beauty, such splendor—gold and silver and minerals, and lush forests. And, this South American president said to Roger Babson, “The difference between our two bodies of earth and land is this: those who came to our shores came seeking gold; those who came to your shores came seeking God.” That is the difference. Our American government is rooted in faith in Almighty God.

The Declaration of Independence from Great Britain was also at the same time, with the same breath, a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. “We hold these truths to be self-evident...”—we don’t argue about this. We don’t debate this. We don’t quibble about this—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are...endowed by their”—what’s the next word?—“Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” Did our Founding Fathers believe in God? Absolutely! Did they believe in evolution or creation? They believed in creation. They said, “That’s self-evident.” Of course it is. The Bible says, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*” (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). And so, with the same breath that they declared independence from Great Britain they declared dependence upon Almighty God.

Fifty of the 55 men who framed the Constitution of the United States were professing Christians. Thirty of them were what we would call today bold Christians, and 20 of them were believing Christians. In 1778, James Madison, the framer, the architect, of the federal Constitution, the fourth President of the United States said this. Listen: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.” And, now we can’t even post those Ten Commandments on the classroom walls. No wonder Jamie has sung, “We Need God in America Again.”

On April 30, 1789, George Washington said, at his first inaugural address, “My

fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.” And then, he went on to say—Washington went on to say, “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.” That’s the father of our country. He knew that we must depend upon God. This was the George Washington, that devout man who went to kneel in the snow at Valley Forge and ask God’s blessing upon his little ragtag army that won the liberties that you and I enjoy this day. When the Continental Congress was meeting, a stranger came and wanted to see which one was George Washington. A man who knew George Washington said, “He’ll be easy to pick out. He’ll be the tall redhead who kneels when the Congress stops to pray.”

In December 1820, Daniel Webster said, “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed in its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions...”—listen—“all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.” That’s what Daniel Webster said in 1820.

Now, folks, we have today some revisionists, some people who are trying to rewrite history, some people who are trying to take away from us the Christian heritage that Jim Whitmire spoke of a while back.

On July 4, 1821, John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this—now, listen—The highest glory of the American Revolution was this:”—here it is; listen—“it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” Our Founding Fathers believed in the separation of church and state, but not for one fleeting moment did they believe in the separation of God and government. And then, Quincy Adams went on to say, “From the day of the declaration...they”—the American people, that is—“were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the Gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledge as the rules of their conduct.”

Let me tell you what President Andrew Jackson said on June 8, 1845: “[The Bible] is the rock upon which our Republic rests.”

In February 1861, old Abe Lincoln gave his farewell address in Springfield, Illinois—and here’s what he said: “Unless the great God who assisted [Washington] shall be with me and aid me, I must fail; but if the same omniscient mind and mighty arm that directed and protected him shall guide and support me I shall not fail... Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now.” That’s Abraham Lincoln. Well,

what did he believe about the Bible? “In regard to this Great Book,”—the Bible—“I have but to say, it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong.” Let me just pause here to say politicians prate about values. If you want to put him in the corner and just say, “Whose values?” and he begins to sputter, listen to what Lincoln said about the Bible: “But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it”—talking about the Bible.

It’s no wonder, therefore, in March 1931, the U.S. Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. Do you remember what the fourth stanza says?

*Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: “In God is our trust!”*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

No wonder that in 1952 Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, said, “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” That is, it’s just in the woodwork of our nation.

In June 1954, Congress adopted this phrase, “under God,” to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance—not just “one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,” but “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” In July 1956, by joint resolution, Congress adopted a bill providing that the national motto in the United States of America is this: “In God we trust.”

Now, folks, I’m not talking to you about a fairytale when I tell you that no nation ever had such a Christian beginning as America. But, I must sadly confess to you on this morning that our national heritage lies in decay, our Christian values are in retreat, and Jamie Parker was quite correct when he sang and said, “We need God in America again.” We need a national revival.

Sexual promiscuousness, the open parading of perversion, the disposal of unwanted, unborn children, the breakup of the family, the obsession with self and materialism—all of these speak of a society on its last legs. And, if America is not born again, she will join the graveyard of the nations. Every day in America thousands of preborn babies are put to death, sacrificed as a blood sacrifice for the god of lust, the demon god of lust. Most of these abortions are abortions of convenience, a form of birth control. We have in America sort of a moral schizophrenia where a person can be fined 5,000 dollars and put in jail for a year for crushing the egg of a bald eagle, and a doctor can make a handsome living by killing babies in the mother’s womb. Friend, we live in a sick society. America needs a miracle, because if we don’t have a miracle—listen—we

are on a collision course with judgment, as surely as there's a God in Heaven.

Now, you have your Bible open to Psalm 85. I want you to listen to the prayer of a patriot in his day. Psalm 85, beginning in verse 4: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:4–6). It is a prayer for revival. Three things I lay on your heart this morning from that text.

I. The Source of Revival

First of all, the source of revival. Look in verse 6: *“Wilt thou not revive us again...?”* (Psalm 85:6). He's speaking to God. Now, some of us may live in despair. Some of us may let our hands hang down and our head bend over and we say it's too late. Friend, disabuse yourself of the idea that it's too late for America, because there's a God in Heaven—there's a God in Heaven. Don't say that revival is impossible. His power and His grace are sufficient. God is not old. God is not tired. God is not palsied. God is not worn out. God is not impotent. He is omnipotent. You say, “But, pastor, sin is pandemic.” Yes, but the Bible says, in Romans chapter 5, verse 20: *“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Romans 5:20). Don't you love that? *“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”* The sin of mankind is no excuse for not having revival. It's an insult to God to say that we cannot have revival in this time.

There's a God in Heaven, and God is our hope. But, may I say, conversely, God is our biggest threat. Al Qaeda is not our biggest threat. God is our biggest threat. I'm not afraid of what terrorists will do to us nearly as much as I am afraid of what God Himself will do to us if we do not repent. These Scriptures talk about the anger of God. Our sin, our national sin, angers God, and so we need to repent.

We don't look to some political party to save us. Put away the idea that the Republicans or the Democrats or the Independents or the Libertarians can save us. We dare not identify our faith with any political party. We need to find a candidate, get behind him, and vote for him if he will stand up for God and for righteousness. We need to get in to some political system and work for it. That's fine. But, don't identify God with it. We need to be able to tell to all parties, Democrats and Republicans and Independents, to repent and get right with God. God is God.

Government can't save us. All that government can do is protect us from evil. That's the purpose of government—not to make us good. Government can't make us good. People say you can't legislate morality. They're right. You cannot. There's not a law on Earth that can make you honest and loving and kind and compassionate. There's no law that can make you love me, so I have to have a law to keep you from killing me. Laws are not here to legislate morality; they are here to legislate against immorality.

Only God can make us good. Our government is a government, as we've said, based in the concept that there is a God. And, if you take God out of the American government, friend, we're in a mess, because you have wicked people who will elect wicked people who will make wicked laws apart from God. The source of revival—Almighty God.

Look up here, congregation. Do you believe in God? Say yes. Is He able? Yes. Is He willing? Yes. Is He mighty? Yes. Can He send revival? Yes, yes, yes. Get your eyes off the problem; get your eyes on God. That's the source of revival.

II. The Subjects of Revival

Now, let's think of the subjects of revival. Look at our text again: *"Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people"—thy people—"may rejoice in thee?"* (Psalm 85:6). It's not the unsaved that need revival. They've never had *vival*. Revival is to bring back, to reinvigorate that which was once there. It is the people of God that God is talking to. *The answer to America is not in the schoolhouse, not in the state house, but in the church house*. I'm as convinced of this as I am of the fact that I'm standing here: that the only hope for America lies in her churches, in her people.

Now, there's the text that we've almost worn out. In the fear of perhaps seeming redundant or trite, I want to share with you again 2 Chronicles 7 and verse 14. I want you to listen to it. You ought to know it by heart. God has said, *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* (2 Chronicles 7:14). That's 2 Chronicles 7 and verse 14. I'm going to pull over here for a moment and park. I want us to look at that text again, that wonderful text that God gave to His ancient people Israel. Someone says, "Well, that doesn't apply to America. That applies to Israel." Friend, there are universal principles in that text that apply to any nation anywhere.

A. The People That God Has

First of all, notice the people that God has. God says, *"If my people..."* You see, God doesn't say, "If Hollywood would, if only the narcotics people would, if only the Supreme Court would, if only Congress would, if only Washington would. No. God says, *"If my people..."* He's talking to us. The future of America is in our hands. You may not believe that, but I believe it. God is talking to you, sir; you, young lady; you, mister; you, lady. God is talking here to Adrian. He's talking to Bryson. He's talking to Jim. He's talking to all of us. The people God has.

B. The Pride That God Hates

Now, here's the second thing—listen to it: not only the people that God has, but the pride that God hates. God says, *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall"—do*

what?—“*humble themselves.*” Now, you’re foolish if you pray, “God, make me humble.” You won’t like the way He does it. Go ahead and humble yourself. Pride stalks through America. We talk about our vaunted American ingenuity. *Most of the people in America are egomaniacs strutting to Hell, thinking they’re too good to be damned. We’re trying to save face when we need to be on our face before Almighty God.* We need to humble ourselves. There needs to be brokenness. You see, the Bible says, “God resists the proud; He gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Not only will God not help us, but God will oppose us if we’re arrogant. You need to guard against pride in your own personal life. *Nothing puts a man so far out of the reach of Satan as genuine humility.* God wants this nation to humble ourselves. And, if we will not, there are other ways that God has to humble us, but we won’t like it.

C. The Prayer That God Hears

Now, listen. The people God has. The pride that God hates. Now the prayer that God hears. “*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray,*”—what kind of prayer?—“*and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways...*” The prayer that God hears is the prayer that seeks the face of God. Do you know what the face of God is? That’s revival. Over and over again in the Bible we’re told, “Make thy countenance to shine upon us.” The face of God, the smile of God, the countenance of God, is revival, where God doesn’t turn away His face, but God smiles upon us.

Now, we’re told to seek God’s face. What are most of us seeking? We’re seeking God’s hand. We’re saying, “God, do something.” No, no, don’t seek God’s hand; seek God’s face—seek God’s face—because if you seek God’s hand and ask God to do something, you will not like what He does if there’s un-confessed, un-repentant sin in your life, because God’s hand will judge us. God’s face will save us. We’re to seek His face and turn from our wicked ways.

Do you think God is going to hear the prayer of an unrepentant people? The Bible says, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me*” (Psalm 66:18). Now, if you want God’s face, you’ve got to turn from your sin. Why? It’s obvious. “*Thou art of purer eyes than to...look upon iniquity*” (Habakkuk 1:13). Do you think God can smile upon sin? Do you think God can countenance and fellowship with sin? No. It’s obvious. If we want God’s face, if we want God’s smile, if we want God’s beneficence, we must turn from our wicked ways. You say, “Well, I hope America does.” No, friend, I hope you do. America’s is but the sum total of its population. There can never be national repentance without individual repentance, one by one by one by one, as we pray.

D. The Promise That God Honors

The people God has. The pride that God hates. The prayer that God hears. And, the promise that God honors. “Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and

will heal their land.” Prayer is not some sort of a smokescreen that we can hide our sin in, but when we deal with our sin, then God is fully able—well and able—to send revival to this nation. Friend, God has sent revival in dark days before, and God can do it again. When we are humble and when we are holy, we will be heard.

III. The Sign of Revival

Now I’ve talked to you about the source of revival: *“Wilt thou not revive us again...?”* I’ve talked to you about the subjects of revival: *“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* Now let me talk to you for a few moments before we go about the sign of revival. What is true revival? It is rejoicing in God—not rejoicing in things, not rejoicing in privileges, not vaunting ourselves in pride, but rejoicing in God. You see, revival comes in three stages.

A. A Time of Weeping

First of all, there’s a time of weeping. And, we have plenty to weep about, beginning with the coldness of our own heart, the ineptitude of our churches, the weakness of our prayers, the lostness of our neighbors and children. Revival begins with a time of weeping.

B. A Time of Reaping

And then, it continues with a time of reaping. When you have genuine revival, souls come to Jesus in multiplied numbers, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of souls will come to Jesus Christ, gold grain to be laid at His feet, if we have genuine revival. Don’t you want to see an end-time harvest? Don’t you want to see millions swept into the kingdom?

C. A Time of Rejoicing

Revival is a time of weeping. It is a time of reaping. And then, it is a time of rejoicing: *“that thy people might rejoice in thee.”* I long to see in this congregation, in my own heart, in your heart, our hearts, a burning, blazing, emotional, passionate love for the Lord Jesus Christ, where we rejoice in God. There’s no greater joy, no higher joy. That’s the sign of revival.

Conclusion

Now, folks, think with me. What are we going to do here as we celebrate the Fourth of July? Are we going to just watch our freedoms and our liberties recede over the horizon? Or, are we as churches and individuals going to pray for God to send revival? You say, “Pastor Rogers, that’s rhetoric, that’s preaching, but it’s just not going to happen.” Well, if you feel that way, you may be right. But, you see, there’s a God in the glory. There’s hope as long as there’s God.

You think of the revivals in history. Think of the time when Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne of Israel and Elijah was the prophet of God. He challenged the priests of Baal, who were very much like our baby butchers today, and he said, “We’re going to build an altar. We’re going to put a sacrifice upon it. And, the God that answers by fire, let Him be God.” Then he said, “Bring four barrels of water and pour it on the sacrifice—four more barrels, four more barrels—12 barrels of water.” The Bible says, “. . .the water covered the slain bullock, went down over the wood, over the stones, and filled up the trench that was around the altar.” And then Elijah prayed, and he said, “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let it be known that thou art God this day. O God, turn the hearts of this people back to you.” And then, the Bible says, “And the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice and the wood and the stones, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” Why did Elijah say, “Pour the water on; the God that answers by fire, let Him be God?” You don’t start a fire with water. What was he doing? He was saying that the God that can’t burn wet wood is no good. Everything doesn’t have to be just right for revival, all right? I mean, don’t insult God by saying, “The wood is too wet; it can’t burn today.” God is God is God is God. We need to believe that—“that the people may know that thou art God.” And, God sent revival in those days in Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16–39).

You think of revival in Jerusalem—Pentecost—how unlikely that was. This was a place where they’d stoned the prophets. Never was there a city that hated Jesus Christ more, because there they clamored for His death and nailed Him to the cross. There was scandal in the church. One of His disciples had betrayed Him. Another had cursed and denied Him. The rest were panic-stricken. And yet, the Day of Pentecost came and thousands and thousands were swept into the Kingdom of Heaven. If God sent revival to Jerusalem, God can send revival to Memphis, Tennessee. I believe that with all of my heart.

You think of the Dark Ages, where the children in our Sunday School know more of the Bible than the priests and the leaders of that day. God raised up Luther. God raised up Calvin. God raised up other mighty leaders, and what we call the Protestant Reformation was really a mighty revival where thousands came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revival came to Wales in 1904. The writer who described it said, “It came like an unexpected tornado.” I don’t even have time to describe that revival. You need to get the books and read about revival.

I have visited Korea. A mighty revival is working in Korea. I have visited Romania. A mighty revival is working in Romania. I have visited Central America. God is moving, and thousands and thousands are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in Central America. God is moving in Africa, and the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is growing

exponentially. Are we going to let other people be blessed and us miss the blessing? No! No! We can have revival.

Well, you say, "I don't know. It may be too late for America." Well then, if we can't have revival in America, let's have revival in Tennessee. And, if we can't have revival in Tennessee, let's have revival in Memphis. And, if we can't have revival in Memphis, let's have revival in Bellevue. And, if we can't have revival in Bellevue, let's have revival in your Sunday School class. And, if we can't have revival in your Sunday School class, let's have revival in your family. And, if we can't have revival in your family, let's have revival in you. I'm only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do and ought to do, that, by the grace of God, I will do. Why don't you say that? Why don't you stop looking around and saying, "Oh, God, get my heart right." God bless America, and let it begin in me.

A Miracle for America

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 29, 1986

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 85:1–6

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

PSALMS 85:6

Outline

Introduction

I. The Source of Revival

II. The Subject of Revival

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn to Psalm 85. My friend, if you did not bring a Bible with you, then look there in the pew rack before you, and more than likely you will find a copy of God’s holy Word. Psalm 85—and in just a moment, we are going to read together the first six verses. Psalm 85—“A Miracle for America.” The Psalmist said, *“Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:1–6). What you have here is the prayer of a patriot. Here’s a man praying for his nation. And, he’s praying for revival. I want to tell you that I make no apology whatsoever for being a red-blooded, flag-waving American patriot. I believe it is logical, I believe it is reasonable, and I believe it is biblical to be patriot.

A roving reporter came up to a man on the street and said, “Do you know what are the two biggest problems in America?” The pedestrian said, “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” The reporter replied, “You have them both.” Amen? The two biggest problems in America—number one: ignorance; and, number two: apathy. People don’t know, and they don’t care.

And, we have people today who think, “Well, you’re not supposed to be patriotic.” Somehow, everything’s just supposed to be one big globe—one world. Somehow, if

we're patriotic, that's almost unchristian. We're told today that you can't be a Christian and love your country. Well, that's ridiculous—absolutely unmitigated folly. Now, when I love my country, that doesn't mean I don't love other countries. When I want God to bless America, that doesn't mean that I don't want other countries to be blessed. It just means that America is my fatherland. This is the land of my birth, and this is the land of my loyalty and the land of my responsibility.

I love all people, but one day, I'm going to have to stand before God and give account for myself. So, I've got to look out and make certain that I'm right with God, because I can't answer for you, and you can't answer for me. I love your family, but the Bible says, if I provide not for my own, especially of those of my own house, then I have denied the faith. I am worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). And, when I have a responsibility and a loyalty to my family, that doesn't mean I love your family any less. That just means that I have an assignment from God; that is, my family. I love all churches, but dear friend, I have a responsibility to Bellevue church, because this is my church. I'm a member of this local body. If I don't love it, pray for it, support it, and undergird it, then I have failed. I have sinned against God. I love all the countries of the world. But, this is the home, the land, of our birth, and our God-given assignment. We can pray it, mean it, say it, sing it, and shout, "God bless America."

Listen, folks. I want to tell you that I still want to stand at attention when Old Glory goes by. And, I still get a lump in my throat when we pledge allegiance to that flag: "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." I still don't mind getting a little wet in the corner of my eye when they sing "The Star-Spangled Banner." And, I hope that I never do get cold or indifferent about these things. I say it, and I really believe it. Folks, we live in the greatest nation on Earth. That doesn't put down anybody else's nation. That's just being grateful to God.

And, why is America great? Because we have greater natural resources? Other nations have great natural resources. Because Americans are smarter? Yankee ingenuity? No, folks. The IQ of all peoples mean, basically, that America is stronger? No. Why has God blessed America? God has blessed America because America has been built on certain basic God-given principles and presuppositions. No country ever had such a Christian beginning as America. The American dream was placed in the bosom of our Founding Fathers by Almighty God. America is different because of America's beginning. In 1620, when those Pilgrim Fathers came to these shores, they came for a specific purpose. They came on that little ship, the Mayflower, and they went down into the cabin of the Mayflower, and they wrote out a document called the Mayflower Compact. This document that they wrote, the Mayflower Compact, begins in these words, "In the name of God. Amen." That's the way they began. And, in "The Mayflower Compact" they said this: that their coming to the colonies was—and I

quote—“For the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith.” That is why they came to these shores.

A South American president was talking with Roger Batson, a leader of yesteryear, and they were discussing the difference between South America and North America. You know, our land has been so blessed. And, South America, while a great nation and mighty in natural resources, has lagged far behind North America. And so, they were discussing the difference. And, Roger Batson said to this South American president, “What do you think the difference is?” That South American president wisely said, “I’ll tell you the difference.” He said, “Those who settled South America came to South America because they were seeking for gold. Those who came to North America came to North America because they were seeking for God.” And, that is the difference, dear friend. No nation ever had such a beginning as our nation.

In a few days we’re going to celebrate Independence Day. And, we call it Independence Day because it was the day of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. And, do you know how that Declaration of Independence goes? “We hold these truths to be self evident.” That is, we don’t argue about this; this is obvious. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Now, notice, they believe in a Creator; they believe in God. “By their Creator”—they didn’t believe in evolution. “All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” We have rights, but the government does not give these rights. God gives the rights. They are endowed by God. “With certain unalienable rights”—these rights that the government cannot give, and therefore the government has no right to take away, because they come from God. And, I want to tell you that the Declaration of Independence was a declaration of independence from England, but at the same time, it was a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. You read it, and you will see that this is truth.

Now, we have some revisionists. You say, “What is a revisionist?” Well, these are people who want to rewrite history. They want to change history, as it were, by rewriting history and leaving out some of the aspects of our national heritage. But, I want to remind you, dear friend, that our nation was born in the white heat of a spiritual revival. And, of the framers of the Constitution—over 55 men—50 of them were professing Christians, 30 of them were bold Christians, and 20 of them were believing Christians. But, 50 out of the 55 men who framed the Constitution were Christian men. James Madison, the architect of the Federal Constitution, said this—and, by the way, the fourth President of the United States said this—listen—I quote: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and every one of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.” That’s a

significant statement. He's saying we have put it all down; we're laying everything on the line; we're not dependent upon government to save us; we're depending upon individuals to govern themselves upon the premises of the Ten Commandments of Almighty God. Mind you, this man, a President of the United States—the fourth President—was the chief architect of the Constitution.

George Washington, the father of our country, said on April 30th, 1789, in his first inaugural address—I quote: “My fervent supplications to that Almighty [God] who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations and whose providential aide can supply every human defect, that His benediction”—that is, God’s benediction—“may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.” He went on to say, “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained.” He didn’t mind speaking about God.

I’m sure that, if they had an ACLU there at that time, they would have said, “Now, Mr. President, you ought not to be talking about God like this in your inaugural address.” But, you see, he was a man who believed in God, and he knew that this was a nation born in that kind of experience. It was General George Washington that knelt in the snow there at Valley Forge and prayed God’s blessing on his little ragtag Continental Army, and God gave a victory. When a visitor visited the Continental Congress, he was sitting in the gallery. He wanted to know which one was George Washington. The man next to him said, “George Washington will be the tall man that gets on his knees when Congress goes to pray.” That’s the kind of a nation that we have. That’s the kind of a birth that we’ve had.

In December of 1820, Daniel Webster said this—and, I would that you would listen with much care—he said, “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin.” More than a hundred years ago—a century-and-a-half ago—he said, “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers brought hither their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...and to diffuse its influence through all of their institutions, civil, political and literary.” What Daniel Webster said is this: that our Founding Fathers wanted to infuse every area of our life with the principles of Christianity.

John Quincy Adams in 1821 said this—listen. He was about this American Revolution, and he said—and I quote: “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.” Did you hear that? “It connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of Christianity with the principles of government.” Did you hear that? Now, what does that mean? It means that our forefathers believed, as I believe, and I hope

you believe, in the separation of church and state, but they never for one New York minute believed in the separation of God from government—never. And, don't you let anybody tell you any different, because if they do, they are lying—lying.

Friend, no nation ever had the kind of a beginning that our nation had. John Quincy Adams went on to say—and I quote: “From the day of the Declaration...” —and he's talking about the Declaration of Independence—“...[they] are bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.” That's what Adams said. On June 8th, 1845, President Andrew Jackson said, “The Bible is the rock upon which our Republic stands.” That's what he said. That's not some Baptist preacher saying that—that's Andrew Jackson. “The Bible is the rock upon which our Republic stands.”

Abraham Lincoln, in 1861, as he was bidding his farewell in Springfield, Illinois, said this: “Unless the great God who assisted [Washington] shall be with me and aid me, I must fail; but if the same Omniscient Mind and Mighty Arm that directed and protected him shall guide and support me, I shall not fail... Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now.” Good advice, Abraham Lincoln. Do you know what Mr. Lincoln had to say about the Bible, the book that I have here before me? In regards to this great book, he said, “It is the best gift God has given to men. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this Book. But for it we could not know right from wrong.” He certainly didn't believe in values clarification. He didn't believe in the kind of willy-nilly ethics that we have today—*situational ethics*. He believed that we have a Bible that tells us right from wrong. How, my dear friend, are we to say what is right from what is from God? He goes on to say, “All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it”—that is, in the Bible.

In 1941, President Woodrow Wilson said—and I quote: “America was born to exemplify devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scriptures.” This is our birthright: to practice the righteousness which was born in the Holy Scriptures. Who said this? A President of the United States. Therefore we ought not to be surprised that in March 19, 1913 Woodrow Wilson said that. And, in 1931, the United States Congress adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. And, I love that fourth stanza, which says,

Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!

Then conquer we must, when our cause is just,

And this be our motto: “In God is our trust.”

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

That, my friend, is our national anthem.

In 1952, the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said, “We are a religious people, and our institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” You tell that to the ACLU.

You tell that to other people who will make us believe that somehow we've not come from this kind of a background. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower said—and I quote: “The purpose of a devout and united people was set forth in the pages of the Bible; to live in freedom, to work in a prosperous land, and to obey the commandment of God... This Biblical story of the Promised Land inspired the founders of America... It continues to inspire us.” In June 1954, Congress adopted the phrase “under God” to be put into the Pledge of Allegiance. And now, when we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, we pledge it this way: “One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” And, in 1956, not so very long ago, by a joint resolution, Congress had adopted the bill making the national motto of the United States of America this: “In God we trust.” Ronald Reagan has rightly said—and I quote: “The time has come to turn to God and reassert our trust in Him for the healing of America...our country is in need of and ready for a spiritual renewal.” I like the way in the song *America* it says,

*Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.*

*Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King.*

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Friend. *We didn't vote Him in, and we can't vote Him out. He is the King.*

Now, I want to say again, I believe in the separation of church and state. I don't believe that the church has any business meddling in the internal affairs of the state. And, I don't believe that the state has any business meddling in the internal affairs of the church. That is one of the things that our Founding Fathers wrote into the Constitution. I believe in the Bill of Rights. I believe in the right of every American to believe in God or not to believe in God. I believe in the right of an American to be a Jew, a Buddhist, an atheist, a Mormon, a Baptist, or a Catholic—whatever. But, I believe this, dear friend: that we have freedom of speech. Thank God for it. I'm so glad I can stand here in this place and preach today. I'm so glad that the door won't bust open and some Gestapo will come in and take me out. I'm so glad I can preach a sermon like this, and we can say to the government, “This is the way we worship our God. This is what we believe.”

And, we believe in the freedom of speech. We believe that it extends to all Americans everywhere. Therefore, we believe that children in school have a right to pray, because the freedom of speech allows them to do that. They don't have a right to force prayer on anybody else, but they have a right to exercise their faith. Any freeborn

American has the right to pray anywhere, and no government has the right to step in and say, “You can’t do it.” This is a great nation, and I’ll tell you why this nation is a great nation: because she has been built on great, great principles. But, I must confess to you with a broken heart that America is sick because she has forgotten God.

Now, God had given his people of Israel a great heritage, and the Psalmist talks about that heritage in the first several verses of this Psalm. But then, those people got away from God. You see, God had blessed them. No nation up until that time had such a glorious history as Israel. God had called them out, and God had blessed them. And, by the help of God and the aid of God, they had broken the gnawing and tormenting chains of bondage. And, they had come out of the land of Egypt, and they had come into a bountiful land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And, God just started pouring blessing after blessing upon them. And, they prospered, and they were blessed. And then, they forgot God. They went after other gods. They became sleek and well fed, and God judged them, and calamity came. Then, we have the prayer of this prophet: “Wilt thou not revive thy people again: that they may rejoice in thee?” *“Wilt thou not revive us again:”—verse 6—“that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:6).

I tell you, my friend, that America is sick, and if something doesn’t happen then the America that was born in 1776 is soon to join the graveyard of the nations. The scream of the great American eagle has become the twitter of a frightened sparrow. And, what used to be the greatest nation in the eyes of many has become a laughing stock in the eyes of many. And, the old ship of state has lost its mooring, and it’s on a collision course with disaster. We have let the secular humanists come in and try to bring us away from our roots and bring us away from the principles upon which we are founded. And, we have all kinds of dehumanizing influences, because there’s nothing more dehumanizing than that so-called humanism.

And, that is seen, dear friends, in the taking of the lives of little preborn babies here in the United States of America. If you want to see how low we’ve gone, don’t look at pornography to see it. Don’t look at the narcotics industry to see it. Don’t look at the horrible racism to see it. Don’t go to the slumlords to see how low we’ve gone. Don’t go to the backroom politics. If you want to see how low we’ve gone as a nation, and if you want to see why we are ripe for judgment, then go back and review again what happened in 1973, when nine men—Supreme Court Justices—said that little preborn children no longer have civil rights and that they have been dehumanized; their personhood has been taken from them. Ladies and gentlemen, that’s what Hitler did to the Jews. Before the gas ovens, he took away their personhood, their human rights, and their right to be recognized as persons. They were then treated as things to be destroyed. Every day in America, 4,300 precious little preborn children are put to death. They are murdered. There is something mighty wrong in America.

The other day I read of a father who took his newborn child—he was in the delivery room—he took that newborn child that had just been delivered—took it, and threw it upon the floor and crushed the life out of that little baby. Do you know what they did to that father? They arrested him and charged him with murder. And, well, they should have. But, I want to tell you something ironic. One day before that father did that, a medical doctor in a white coat could have taken the life of that child, and they would have paid him for it. Does that make sense to you? No. And, it doesn't make sense to God.

You know, when I talk this way, somebody will say, "I wish you preachers would stay out of politics." Friend, I'm not talking about politics now. You know what happens when you preach on these issues? They say, "Now, he's getting political." But then, you get the politician with the foghorns going on over here and making speeches somewhere. And, you say to the politician, "Sir, tell us what you feel about abortion." "Oh," he says, "that's a religious matter." When I talk about it, they say, "That's a political matter." Then, when he doesn't want to talk about it, he says, "It's a religious matter." I want to tell you that, whether it is political or whether it's religious, it's wrong; it's wrong to take the lives of these little babies.

Did you know that in the United States of America, if you willfully and deliberately destroy the egg of an eagle—if you crush the egg of an eagle—do you know what they will do to you? They will fine you 5,000 dollars and put you in prison for a year for destroying the egg of an eagle. They say, "Well, of course. There's a little baby eagle in there." Friend, listen. We're talking about human beings. What's more important: a bird or a baby? What is more important? "Well," they say, "we're not sure when life begins." Well then, if you're not sure, then you'd better be careful. I mean, suppose I'm out hunting, and I shout into the bushes because I see some movement in there. The next scene is in court. They say, "You killed an innocent human being." I say, "It's not my fault. I saw some movement. I didn't know whether it was an animal or a human. I didn't know, so I just shot. I wasn't sure." Do you know what they would say to me? "Mister, you'd better not squeeze the trigger until you are sure." Now, I'll tell you, if we're not sure when human life begins, then who gets the benefit of the doubt? I'd say it's that little baby in the womb.

I'm sure when human life begins: it begins at conception. What other kind of life is that? Animal life? Vegetable life? It's human life. There's a little baby in there, and God have mercy upon us. When a nation begins to destroy its own, there is something wrong. And, I tell you—listen, friend—the judgment of God, the seething judgment of God, is upon this nation. And, we need to pray and say, "Oh, God, *'wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee.'*"

Now, you are not going to hear a lot of the things that I preach and say today in the

media. As a matter of fact, the media will put us down for it. They are trying to make us look like backwoods, red-necked somebodies, right-winged fanatics, or stuff like that. They'll call us by all kinds of pejorative terms, because the media is weighted against us—what you see on television. They will tell you the media moguls are just holding up a mirror to America; it's just a mirror. They say, "If you don't like it, then we're just showing you what you are." But, dear friends, the statistics tell us that there is 10 times more violence on television than there is in society. It's not America. They are leading. They are projecting. They are leading us out further and further and further and further away. They say they are unbiased.

In 1982, Jane Fonda had her book on exercise listed in the *New York Times* as the number one bestseller. But, I want to tell you something. That same year, Francis Schaeffer had a book, *A Christian Manifesto*, one of the finest books ever written; it sold twice as many books as Jane Fonda's book. It wasn't even listed in the *New York Times*—not even listed. Don't tell me that there's not a bias. Don't tell me that there's not a prejudice. There are people who would like to rewrite our history, and there are people that would like to keep us in some sort of a vacuum. And, there are people who want to move us more and more and more away from the Judeo-Christian background upon which we have been founded. And, it's time that some of us prayed the prayer of a patriot: "*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*"

I. The Source of Revival

Now, think with me for a moment about the source of this revival. "*Wilt thou not revive us again?*" Do you know where our hope is? It's not in Washington. It's not in the Pentagon. It's not at Wall Street. Where is our hope? Our hope is not with the Democrats, and our hope is not with the Republicans. We don't need to give our hopes to either one. We need to stay a little aloof, so that we can say to the Democrats and to the Republicans, "Repent." Our hope is in God. But, *not only is God our hope, God is also our biggest threat. I'm not as concerned about what the Communists will do to us as I am about what Almighty God will do to us if we don't repent.* "*Wilt thou not revive us again?*"

II. The Subject of Revival

Now, notice the subject of revival: "*Wilt thou not revive us again?*" Who? Let me ask a question: Where is the problem in America? It is not in Hollywood. It is not in the pornography shop. It is not with the liquor dealer and the beer baron. It is not with the backroom politicians. Do you want me to tell you where the problem in America is? It is right here in this room—"Wilt thou not revive us again?"—with God's people. God says, in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble*

themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” God looks to His people to repent. You know, as I know, that our churches are filled with moral worldings who are living double lives and singing “God Bless America” with crocodile tears in their eyes. But, God says that when we are humble, and when we are holy, we will be heard, and we will be healed. God will heal our land, and we can take God at His word. *“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”*

Conclusion

What is revival? First of all, it is a time of weeping when we are broken for our sins. Secondly, it becomes a time of weeping when thousands of people come to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, it becomes a time of rejoicing. We rejoice in Him—in God. We’re not asking for a revival for America’s sake, or for our sakes, that we might have bigger buildings and greener lawns and finer parties and healthier kids—no, that we might rejoice in God. So many of us are seeking God’s hand rather than seeking God’s face. But, revival is the smile of God—the blessings of God upon us.

America needs revival. America is sick, ladies and gentlemen. But, there is a God in Heaven, and as long as there is a God in Heaven, I refuse to give up hope. Now, if we can’t have revival in the world, then let’s have revival in America. And, if we can’t have revival in America, then let’s have revival in Memphis. And, if we can’t have revival in Memphis, then let’s have revival in Bellevue. And, if we can’t have revival in Bellevue, then let’s have revival in the choir. And, if we can have revival in the choir, then let’s have revival in your family. And, if we can’t have revival in your family, then let’s have revival in you, and say, “Oh, God, begin a revival.” God is a gracious God, and we need to pray the prayer of a patriot: “Oh, God, wilt thou not revive thy people? Revive us, oh God, that thy people may rejoice in thee.”

A Miracle for America

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 9, 1990

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 85:4–6

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

PSALMS 85:6

Outline

Introduction

I. The Possibility and Power of Revival

II. The People of Revival

A. The People That God Has

B. The Pride That God Hates

C. The Prayer God Hears

D. The Promise God Honors

III. The Product of Revival

A. A Time of Weeping

B. A Time of Reaping

C. A Time of Rejoicing

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn please to Psalm 85, if you would. In just a moment we're going to look at verses 4 through 6. I preached to you in the last message when we were together about the critical situation in our land today. We may be on the brink of a world holocaust. Many of us feel that we are very close to the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The heartthrob of my heart tonight and my passion as your pastor and as your preacher tonight is that there will be in America a God-blessed, Heaven-sent, Christ-exalting, devil-defying, sin-killing, and soul-saving old-fashioned revival. I believe with all of my heart that a revival is possible. I am not a pessimist. I am not an optimist. I am a biblical realist. And, I believe, dear friend, that we need to face the facts as they are.

Listen to God's Word. Psalm 85 and verses 4 through 6: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:4–6).

I want to talk to you tonight, in light of the crisis that we're in, on this subject: “A

Miracle for America”—“A Miracle for America.” And, may I say on the outset of this message that I believe with all of my heart, I say without stutter or stammer or apology, that America is still the greatest nation on the face of this globe. I believe that. I make no apology whatever for being a patriot and for being a loyal, flag-waving American. And, I’m not ashamed to stand at attention when Old Glory passes by. And, I still feel a lump in my throat as I stand to say the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag. And, I am not embarrassed by tears when we stand and sing “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

America is a great nation, but she is not great because of her natural resources. We do have natural resources from sea to shining sea, but we’re not the only nation that has great natural resources. Recently we visited South America. What a great land that is! How abundant in natural resources! We are not a great nation because of our native sons. Americans are no stronger, no wiser, than other people. Why is America a great nation? Plainly, simply put, it is this: America is a great nation because she has been blessed of God. The Bible says, *“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD”* (Psalm 33:12).

May I tell you again, without stutter, stammer, or equivocation, that no nation in the history of the world ever had such a Christian beginning as our God-blessed America? The American dream was placed in the bosom of our Founding Fathers by the Almighty Himself. And, the original colonies were founded—and, I can show you beyond contradiction—the original colonies were founded because of the Christian faith. The Pilgrims, when they landed in 1620, came to our shores seeking religious liberty. The Mayflower Compact that they wrote as they huddled beneath the decks of that little ship begins with these words: “In the name of the God, Amen.” And then, they stated their purpose for coming. And, it says this: “For the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith.”

I want to tell you that, because today we have some historians, some revisionists, and others, who have tried to rewrite our history. Many of our children today who read the secular schoolbooks are not reading the truth about the beginning and the founding of America. And, we have people today who would try to stampede us away from our Christian heritage and our Christian foundation. But, my dear friend, America is great because she has been blessed of God.

Roger Batson, an early economist in America, was talking to a South American president. And, they were discussing the difference between North America and South America, and why North America seemed to have prospered and grown and blossomed as she has. And, Roger Batson asked this South American president, “What is the difference?” He said this—he says, “The difference lies in the fact that those who came to our shores came to our shores”—that is, South America—“seeking gold. But, those who came to your shores came seeking God.” And, that, my dear friend, is the

difference.

Our forebears wrote a Declaration of Independence. And, in that Declaration of Independence, they wrote, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” The government does not give those rights. Our forebears said God gives the rights. The government is merely here to protect those rights. And, our forebears did not believe in evolution; they believed in a God. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are...endowed by their Creator.” They said, “We’re not even going to argue about that.” That is what? Self-evident—self-evident. “We just simply believe that. We accept it.”

Now, my dear friend, when they wrote the Declaration of Independence, it was, on the one hand, a declaration of independence from England, but at the very same time, it was a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God.

Did you know that 50 of the 55 men who framed the Constitution of the United States were professing Christians? Thirty were said to be bold Christians, and 20 were said to be believing Christians. In 1788, James Madison, who was the architect of the Federal Constitution and the fourth President of the United States, said this—and I’m going to quote him, and I want you to listen: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future...upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves...to sustain ourselves”—listen—“according to the Ten Commandments of God.”

Now, do you know what we’ve done in this day and this age? We have taken the Ten Commandments off the walls of our public schools. And, when the Commandments went out, the policemen have come in. No longer do we have the Ten Commandments on the walls; we have the policemen in the halls. We are very smart, aren’t we?

George Washington, the first President, the father of our country, on April 13, 1789, at his first inaugural address, said this: “My fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes... We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which Heaven itself has ordained.”

Now, does that sound like a secularist? I wonder what the ACLU would think of that? My dear friend, let me tell you that ours is a nation that was born in the fires of revival. In December 1820, Daniel Webster said—and I want you to listen to what this great American said—quote: “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin.” Did you hear that? “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its

light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate...and...diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.” That’s what Daniel Webster had to say.

My dear friend, on July 4, 1821, that great American John Quincy Adams said this—and I quote: “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond”—listen—“the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.”

Now, my friend, our forefathers believed in the separation of church and state, but they did not believe in the separation of God and government. Now, put it down big and plain and straight. John Quincy Adams went on to say, “From the day of the Declaration...they”—that is, the American people—“were bound by the laws of God, which they all, and by the laws of the gospel, which they nearly all, acknowledged as the rules of their conduct.” Not just a belief in God, but a belief in the gospel.

No wonder on June 8, 1845, President Andrew Jackson said, “The Bible is the rock upon which our republic rests.” Abraham Lincoln said on one occasion concerning the Bible, “In regards to this great Book, I have but to say it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong.” Now, friend, that is a tremendous statement. Do you know what Abraham Lincoln said? If you don’t have a Bible, you won’t know right from wrong.

We have the modern educators today who talk about putting into the classroom values. Then the next question comes: Whose values? Who is to say what is right or wrong? Well did that great, tall, gaunt, bearded American say, “If it is not for the Bible, we will not know right from wrong.” And then, Abraham Lincoln went on to say, “All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are found portrayed in [the Bible].” That’s not a Baptist preacher saying that; that was Abraham Lincoln who said that.

So, you can understand why the American Congress in 1931 adopted “The Star-Spangled Banner” as our national anthem. Have you ever thought about the fourth stanza of “The Star-Spangled Banner”? Listen to how it goes. It’s a prayer. People who don’t want us to pray in school would not let us if they were consistent sing the Star-Spangled Banner. Listen to how the fourth stanza goes:

*Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto, “In God is our trust.”*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

It’s a prayer of praise to Almighty God. To take God out of the classroom you’d have to take the national anthem out of the classroom.

In 1951, the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said this: “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” I mean, dear friend, it is written into warp and woof of our Constitution. So, no wonder, in June 1954, Congress adopted as our official motto the phrase “under God” to be added to the Pledge of Allegiance. And now, we stand and pledge the allegiance this way: “One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” And, in July 1956, by joint resolution, Congress adopted a bill providing that the national motto is, “In God we trust.” Don’t you let some secularist, don’t you let some humanist, and don’t you let some revisionist tell you that America does not presuppose in her founding a spiritual beginning.

Now, it comes back to my question, why has God blessed America? Does God bless America because Americans are bigger, taller, and smarter? Or, because we have more gold, steel, and ore in the ground? Or, because the trees grow better here, or it rains more here? No, my dear friend. God has blessed America because of her national heritage. “The Star-Spangled Banner” puts it this way—and I agree:

*Blest with vict’ry and peace,
may the Heav’n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made
and preserved us a nation!*

—FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

My dear friend, God’s power has made and preserved us.

And so, the song *America* goes on to say, “

*Our fathers’ God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom’s holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,*

What is that next line?

Great God our King.

—SAMUEL FRANCIS SMITH

Don’t let anybody tell you Americans don’t have a king. Friend, you didn’t vote Him in, and you can’t vote Him out.

*Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King.*

Now, having said that, I want to say with a broken heart that America is sick, sick, sick—sick almost to death. Like Israel of old, America has a glorious heritage. Like Israel of old, America has become the wonder of the world. Israel of old broke the

gnawing and tormenting chains of bondage and came out of Egypt, and God made them a great nation. But, like Israel of old, America has forgotten God.

Charles Colson, whom I love, respect, and know personally, the man who was a part of the Watergate Scandal, spent some time in prison, and now leads a great fellowship, as a born-again Christian, telling prisoners across the world about Jesus Christ, said this—I want you to listen to these incisive words by Charles Colson. Charles Colson said, “The hard truth is that despite the much ballyhooed religious resurgence of the last decade, Christian values are in retreat. We western Christians are losing the struggle for the hearts and the minds of our neighbors.”

Now, what is he saying? It is this. You ask people, “Are you a Christian?” “Oh, yes, I’m a Christian.” “Are you born again?” “Oh, yes, I’m born again.” “Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God?” “Oh yes, I believe the Bible to be the Word of God.” And yet, America is sinking slowly but surely into a cesspool of iniquity. We put more people per capita in jail than any other nation on the face of the earth except South Africa and Soviet Russia. We talk about the Japanese as not knowing the gospel. And, some of us may think of Japan as a pagan land therefore, but there are 100 times more burglaries in the United States than in so-called pagan Japan.

One preacher friend of mine wrote these words—I copied them down to share with you. He said, “America is rolling in luxuries, reveling in excesses, reeling in drunkenness, revolting in morals, and rotting in sin.” He went on to say that, “Our nation perfumed with an aroma of religion and culture, but it is only spiritual formaldehyde disguising the deadly decay of a society on its last legs.”

Do you want some proof of that? May I tell you, dear friend, of the holocaust of abortion? That alone proves that we have become a secular state. With arbitrary morality, and the concomitant evaluation of human life, in that infamous court ruling, 1973 Roe vs. Wade, a decision was made that is tragic. Do you know what that court did? It did the same thing that Adolf Hitler did so long ago. Adolf Hitler, in order to deal with the Jews that he did not want, reclassified them. Adolf Hitler reclassified the Jews as nonpersons. And, since they were declassified as persons, then, my dear friend, they could be done with as they wished. They were out from under the protection of the law.

Now, we have a society that has by law said that preborn babies are nonpersons. Why did we do that? Well, the politicians did it to get the votes, to please certain women. Why did the women want that? Well, they wanted that, dear friend, for convenience—many of them, not all of them. But, these secularists make so much of word games. And, if a preacher like myself stands in the pulpit and preaches against abortion, there are always those who say, “Why don’t you stay out of politics?” But, on the other hand, if you talk to one of these fence-straddling, pussyfooting, pusillanimous politicians and ask him, “How do you feel about abortion?” “Well,” he says, “that’s a

religious matter.” I feel like saying, “Make up your mind.” When we preach against it in the pulpit, they say, “Stay out of politics,” but when we face them about fishing or cutting bait, they duck their head, and they say it’s a religious matter. But, my dear friend, whether you call it political or religious, the babies are dying, and it’s wrong to kill babies. It is wrong. It is just simply wrong.

Not so long ago, a father went into the delivery room and took his newborn child in his hands and dashed that baby against the walls of that hospital delivery room and snuffed out the life of that baby. Do you know what they did to that father? They arrested him and charged him with murder. And, well they should have. But, irony of ironies, only a few hours prior to that, a doctor could have been paid for killing the same baby. Now, tell me, my dear friend, where is the logic in that? In America, 4,300 preborn babies will legally be put to death under the protection of the Supreme Court in an average day. And, 97 percent of those abortions will be abortions for convenience. Abortion has become one of our nation’s major means of birth control.

I don’t believe there’s anything that demonstrates the schizophrenia—and, that’s all I can call it—of America more than this. In America, if you were caught destroying the egg of an American bald eagle, my dear friend, the law says that you can be fined 5,000 dollars for destroying the egg of an American eagle, and be put into jail up to one year. Now, why? Well, they say there’s a bird in that egg, and we value that bird. My dear friend, do we value something with feathers more than a baby, a child, made in the image of Almighty God. What has happened to us? What is wrong with the land born in the fires of revival? We want to know why America is having so much trouble. Have we removed the audacity to stand and sing “God, bless America”? It’s a wonder He doesn’t blot us off the face of the earth.

You say, “Well, I don’t believe in that.” No, the Bible says that we have allowed it. *“Happy is he that condemneth not himself”*—the Bible says—*“in that thing which he alloweth”* (Romans 14:22). The late great Francis Schaffer has said that humanism has now replaced Christianity as the consensus of the West. And, he said, “Our freedom is in danger.”

Now, may I tell you, dear friend, that what I’m preaching tonight is not preached in many pulpits. And, I don’t think I’m alone a prophet of God. But, many of us have been muzzled and silenced, and may I tell you that you don’t expect to get a fair shake from the media. The media, by and large, is anti-God and anti-Christ—not altogether, but by and large. And, the devil has pipelined things into our living rooms. If you watch television, you’ll have an average of 38 acts of violence every hour. When you remonstrate with these who produce these films, they say that they are only a mirror of the American society. But, that’s a lie. The violence is 10 times more, statistically, than there is on the streets. They are not a mirror; they are leading the way. And, if you get

tired of violence, then you can turn to the afternoon soap opera and see the eroticism on the afternoon and evening soaps. And, there in the living rooms of America, now you will see affairs including homosexual, bisexual, and even incest affairs as entertainment. I am talking about on soap operas. These things are there.

There is a bias, my dear friend, in the media. May I tell you that Jane Fonda wrote an exercise book in May 1982. It was on the *New York Times* bestseller list. And, it only sold half as many copies as Dr. Francis Schaffer's *Christian Manifesto*, which wasn't even listed. Friend, we're not getting a fair shake, and we don't need a fair shake, because, dear friend, we have something better. But, we're failing to use it.

America needs a miracle. America needs a revival. And, what we have here in this text that I'm going to get to now is the prayer of a patriot. It's a prayer given long ago, but it is a prayer that is as rich and pertinent as ever in history. Listen to it again: "*Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*" (Psalm 85:4–6).

My dear friend, let me talk to you just a few moments about "A Miracle for America." Let me talk to you about true revival.

I. The Possibility and Power of Revival

And, first of all, let me talk to you about the possibility and the power of that revival. Notice to whom this prayer is addressed in verse 6: "*Wilt thou not revive us again...?*" (Psalm 85:6). You say, "Adrian Rogers do you have hope?" Of course I have hope. Why? Because there's a God in Heaven—that's why. My dear friend, we cannot say we cannot have revival. God has sent revival before in dark times, and God can send revival in these dark and desperate days in which we live. And, as long as there's a God in Heaven, there's a possibility of revival.

Somehow, some way, we've gotten the idea that there was a time when God had power to shake cities, rescue multitudes. There was a time when God had power to change institutions, but somehow we think that God today doesn't have the power that He used to. Perhaps we think that God is getting old, or perhaps God is getting sick, or God is getting tired. But, the Bible says that, "*Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God*" (Isaiah 59:1–2). It's not that His ear is heavy or that He cannot hear, nor that His hand is short so that He cannot save, but our sins have separated between us and our God.

Now, God longs to bless America. God wants to bless America. And, dear friend, I don't care how black it is, how dark it is, there is a God in the glory. You say, "But, Adrian, it's different now. We have pornography now. We have cocaine now. We have

secularism now. We have the New Age now. We have this now, and we have that now.” But, my dear friend, we still have God, and God is greater than all of those things.

And, the Bible tells us that, *“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Romans 5:20). Don’t talk to me about demons and demonism. May I tell you, dear friend, that a third of the angels fell. That means that two thirds didn’t fall, and we’ve got two angels for every demon. Don’t talk to me about the power of the devil, for Jesus says, *“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Don’t talk to me about living in the last days, for Jesus said, *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:20). His power has not diminished.

My dear friend, God is our hope, but God is our only hope. Not only is God our only hope; God is our biggest threat. Notice what He says in verse 4: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease”* (Psalm 85:4). I’m not afraid of what the Russians, I’m not afraid of what the Iraqis, and I’m not afraid of what the Red Chinese will do to us, but I’m afraid of what God is going to do to us. *God is our only hope, and God is, my dear friend, our biggest threat.*

Some people, when I preach a sermon on America, think that sometimes I’m being political. But, let me tell you this—and, if you don’t hear anything else I say, I want you to listen plain and straight so you can quote it to other people: We as Christians may find a political party and work in that political party, but we must not identify the church of the Lord Jesus Christ with any political party. We need to speak the Word of God to both parties. We cannot sell our souls to the Democrats or the Republicans, because we must be able to say to both of them, “Repent, and get right with God.” Sure you need to find a candidate and work for him. Sure you need to find a party and get in it. But, dear friend, don’t you identify the God of this Bible with some particular party, as such. We need to find what is the truth of God and measure every party, every politician, and every platform by the Word of God. That, my dear friend, is the possibility of revival. There is a God in the Heavens.

II. The People of Revival

Now, let me talk to you, secondly, about the people of revival. Look again, if you will, in verse 6: “Wilt thou”—that’s the possibility and power—“not revive us”—that’s the people. Now, my dear friend, may I tell you that it’s not the secular humanist who needs a revival. He needs life. To *revive* is to bring something almost dead back to health. They don’t need a revival. They need a *vival*. We’re not talking about Hollywood. We’re not talking about the pornographers when we’re talking about revival. We are talking about the people of God. My dear friend, the problem in America and the cure for America is sitting in congregations like this across America. *“Wilt thou not revive us again?”*

I know that 2 Chronicles chapter 7 and verse 14 was given to Israel. And, sometimes

people say, “Well, you can’t claim 2 Chronicles chapter 7. Well, my dear friend, there are eternal principles in that passage that will apply to any generation. Listen to it. God says, *“If my people, which are called by my name...”*—He’s not talking about Hollywood now. He’s not talking about the liquor dealers now. He’s not talking about the secular humanists now. And, He’s not talking about the New Agers. Now, He says, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land”* (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Now, listen to that text.

A. The People That God Has

First of all, the people that God has. He’s talking about us. Ladies and gentlemen, the hope of America is not in the Pentagon or in the White House; it is in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ; *“My people”*: the people that God has.

B. The Pride That God Hates

And then, secondly, dear friend, I want you to notice the pride that God hates. God says, *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves...”* Don’t pray and ask God to make you humble. Humble yourself. Real revival begins with God’s people on their face. I’ve begun in these last weeks to exercise more and more, and God knows I’m not boasting about it, because I’ve got a long way to go, but I’ve begun now to humiliate myself before God. In my prayers, I’m bowing my head more in humiliation before God, and saying “Oh, God, I prostrate myself before You. I humble myself before You.” The Bible says, *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”* (James 4:6).

C. The Prayer God Hears

The people God has?: *“If my people.”* The pride God hates: *“shall humble themselves.”* The prayer God hears: *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways...”* The need in America today is not eloquence, it’s not energy, it’s not enthusiasm, it’s not influence, and it is not intellect; it is intercession. Satan mocks *at our* schemes. *He* fears *our* prayers. But, notice the prayer there in 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14. It’s a prayer that turns from sin and seeks the face of God. Most of us are not seeking the face of God. We’re seeking the hand of God. It’s not fellowship with God that we want, but it’s the power of God to deliver us. But, God says, “Don’t seek My hand; seek My face. If you find My face, then you will have My hand.”

D. The Promise God Honors

Because, you see, not only the prayer that God hears, but also the promise that God

honors. God says, “*then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*” What He’s saying is that when we’re humble, and when we’re holy, we will be heard. That’s what He is saying.

III. The Product of Revival

I have one last thing I want to talk to you about tonight. I want to talk to you about not only the possibility and power of revival; I want to talk to you not only about the people of revival—“*Wilt thou not revive us again...?*”; but, I want to talk to you about the product of revival.

What is revival? You say, “Pastor, what is it that you are aiming at?” Well, look at the text again—verse 6: “*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in...*”—what? Bigger churches? A better economy? Oil for our great big automobiles? No, my dear friend, when we seek God’s face, what do God’s people rejoice in?—“*that thy people may rejoice in thee*” (Psalm 85:6). The product of real revival is a rejoicing in God Himself, because we’ve been seeking the face of God.

Actually, there are three steps in revival.

A. A Time of Weeping

First of all, there’s a time of weeping, a time of brokenness. And, God knows we have enough to weep about. God knows the sin in our churches, the coldness in our churches, the sinfulness of our people, and the lostness of our neighbors. Oh, we ought to be on our face before God. It’s a time of weeping.

B. A Time of Reaping

And then, real revival is a time of reaping. When God’s people get right, the lost get saved. It culminates in a harvest of souls. And, in real revival, we will bring bushels of golden grain, the harvest, to lie at Jesus’ feet.

C. A Time of Rejoicing

And, after that weeping and reaping, there comes that time of rejoicing. And, oh, we don’t need to be afraid of emotion. My dear friend, I love football, like you love football—some of you. And, I enjoy a game. I enjoy basketball. I enjoy these things, and I get excited over these things. But, my dear friend, what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs is a burning, blazing, passionate, emotional love for the Lord Jesus Christ—I mean, to get excited about the things that really happen. Revival is a blazing, shouting, and emotional passion for God. We’re God’s people. Rejoice in Him; not in His blessings, but in Him alone. I believe it can happen. I believe that God can give us many more years. I believe that this particular church is set so that we might touch our city, and God helping us, to some degree, touch our nation and our world for Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Now, listen to me. I'm finished with my message, but I want to plea to your heart. Are you listening? Everybody here listening: I'm talking to you. If the world will not have revival, then let's have revival in America. And, if America will not have revival, then let's have revival in Tennessee. And, if Tennessee will not have revival, let's have revival in Memphis. And, if Memphis won't have a revival, let's have revival at Bellevue. And, if Bellevue won't have revival, then let's have a revival in our family. And, if your family won't have a revival, then how about you? Just how about you? Why don't you say, "Oh, God, revive me. If my pastor is wrong, if my minister of music is wrong, if my Sunday School teacher is wrong, if my husband, my wife, my father, my mother, my brother, and my sister, Oh, God, let me get right with You. I'm only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And, what I can do, I ought to do. And, what I can do and ought to do, that, by the grace of God, I will do"? Revival in your heart, in his heart, in her heart, in her heart—and, before long, dear friend, the revival fire is burning in America.

Are you listening to me? We don't have much more time. Oh, God, "*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*" I'm not talking about wild-eyed fanaticism; I'm just talking about obeying Jesus and letting Him bless.

The Prayer of a Patriot

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 3, 1983

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 85:4–6

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”

PSALMS 85:6

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Plea for Revival
- II. The Possibility of Revival
- III. The Program for Revival
- IV. The Product of Revival
 - A. The Weeping Stage
 - B. The Reaping Stage
 - C. The Rejoicing Stage

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn with me to Psalm 85, and we’re going to begin reading in verse 4. Now if you did not bring a Bible with you today, look there in the pew before you. There should be one there. The Book of Psalms is relatively easy to find. It’s approximately right in the middle of the Bible. So just let it fall open in the middle, and you’ll be somewhere near the Psalms. And turn to Psalm 85, and let’s begin reading in verse 4: *“Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* (Psalm 85:4–6). The title of our message today is “The Prayer of a Patriot.” Here’s a man who’s praying. He’s watched his nation go from disobedience, to degradation, to dissolution, and now, it’s facing death. And because he loves his land, because he loves his people, he’s praying for revival.

America, today, is on a collision course, and I, for one, am greatly alarmed. I heard about a battleship cruising through the North Atlantic at night. A message came to the admiral, and the message said, “Admiral, there’s a bright light directly in front of us. What are your instructions?” The admiral said, “Send them a message: ‘Alter your course 30 degrees to the south.’” They sent the message. Quick as a flash, the message came back. “You alter your course 30 degrees to the north.” It infuriated the

old admiral. He sent another message. He said, “Tell them this: ‘I am the admiral. I said, “You alter your course 30 degrees to the south.’ ” The message came back, “I am a second-class seaman. You alter your course 30 degrees to the north.” The admiral said, “Send them this message: ‘I’m an admiral. I’m in a battleship. You alter your course 30 degrees to the south.’ ” The message came back again: “This is a second-class seaman. You alter your course 30 degrees to the north. I am in a lighthouse!”

Now friend, God is that lighthouse, and He’s not moving. America is on a collision course with Him. And the old ship of state is going under, unless we alter our course.

And as in that day, in this day, the prayer of a patriot is, “O God, send revival.” Hyman Appleman, a great evangelist, born in Russia, a Jewish man who found Christ—Christ found him—recently went to glory. Hyman Appleman said that *revival* is perhaps the most sinned against word in the English language. It’s shop-worn, abused, and misused, and many people do not know what we’re talking about when we say *revival*. And even those who understand the meaning of the word *revival*, when we speak about revival, all they do is give a sympathetic smile; because, they really do not believe that revival is possible in this day and in this age. But I want you to notice what the man of God said here, in the Word of God, in what we call “The Prayer of a Patriot.”

I. A Plea for Revival

First of all, there’s a plea for revival. Look, again, in verse 6—look at it: “*Wilt thou not revive us again?*” (Psalm 85:6). Now *to revive* means “to bring back to a former state.” In the prior verses, he talked about what God had done for them; but they’d gone into declension, and so, he is praying for revival. Never has a nation had a better start than America. God blessed—God favored—America. Indeed, God has. But America, as a nation, needs a spiritual revival, an earth-shaking, mountain-moving, devil-defying, sin-killing, soul-saving revival.

What’s wrong with us? Well, we have liberalism. We have a juiceless, anemic, educated, polished brand of minister in so many churches, who, somehow, have substituted culture for Calvary, humanistic thoughts for the Word of God, good intentions for the new birth. And Sunday by Sunday, there are those who are trudging to those congregations and going away, who are dying of spiritual malnutrition; and, they have no idea what’s happening to them. Something’s wrong, but they don’t know how to fix it.

And then, to compound that, we have cults with a zeal, that are spreading like wildfire. And I’m not going to mention them, nor call them by name; but, the tragic thing is this: that they use the Master’s methods to make the devil’s disciples. And they will be going from house to house and door to door in our city, many of them this very week. And when they make a convert, he is twice-fold a child of Hell.

And that is compounded by the fact that we still have militant communism. It's passé, today, to talk about communism, and old-fashioned, today, to be against communism. Many of our kids in school learn little about communism, except that it's one more means of having an economic system. Their system is all right for them, and our system is all right for us; and, it makes no difference what system that you choose. Friend, I want to say with all of the unction, function, emotion of my soul; with every nerve, and fiber, and sinew, and passion in my soul; with my body, soul, and spirit—listen to me—communism is unspeakably immoral. The Marxist and socialist countries, in setting up communism, by conservative estimates, have taken the lives of 100 million persons—100 million.

And don't ever get the idea that communism and Christianity can peacefully co-exist. I'm not saying it from the Christian's viewpoint, alone. The organizer of the Socialist Party in Canada said—and I quote: "The Socialist Party is against the worship of Christ. Socialists do not believe in any God. The Church will find in us its mortal enemy." Do you know what a mortal enemy is? That's an enemy that you wish to put to death. Another communist has written a handbook on communism—Bukharin—called "The ABC of Communism." And this is what he said: "Religion and communism are incompatible, both theoretically and practically. All religions are one in the same poison, intoxicating and poisoning the mind, the will, and the conscience. A fight to the death should be declared against them"—that's us—"a fight to the death." And yet, communism is on the march.

There are those today who would tell us, "Well, you know, what we need to do is to just unilaterally disarm. Everything is going to be all right. You don't have to worry." Friend, the communists are going to get America, in their hearts and minds, one way or another—by war, by atomic warfare, if necessary. But Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, that brilliant Russian, that literary genius, who now lives in the free world, said, "We don't need to be afraid of atomic war." He said, "Why should the communists go to war when they can take America, bit by bit, and piece by piece, as nations are falling off into their hands?" And it is a doctrine of communism that, before long, America will fall off into their hands like a piece of over-ripe fruit.

And I want to go on and say that not only are we facing liberalism, and cultism, and communism; but, perhaps, the greatest curse of America is just sheer old materialism. We have a system whose creed is greed, whose god is gold. And the chief aim of most Americans is pleasure. Someone has well said that while the communists are out to conquer the world, Americans are out to enjoy the world. And *we put "In God We Trust" on our money, but "me first" is in our hearts*. And we become lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. And even the Church—those of us who are Christians—many of us have this world on our shoulders, stooping them down, rather than under our feet.

But all of that is compounded by moral degradation and filth. I cannot believe what is happening in America. Sin has become arrogant, boastful. Perverts march. They show their sin as Sodom, and they hide it not. Jeremiah says, “Neither could they blush” (Jeremiah 6:15; Jeremiah 8:12). We’re having an epidemic of diseases that may become pandemic spread by sexual promiscuity. And while those who are perverted have come out of their closets, Christians, for the most part, have failed to enter into theirs, and get upon their knees, and weep and pray to Almighty God.

Did you know that one-third of all of the pre-born life in America—all of the babies that are conceived—those lives are snuffed out by abortion? Did you know that, now, almost two million precious babies are put to death while still in their mother’s womb? I said almost two million. I said one-third of the life that is conceived. And we have the audacity to say, “God bless America.” Listen. If we don’t repent, as surely as my name is Adrian Rogers, as surely as I stand in this pulpit, God is going to judge America. You talk about a holocaust—almost two million precious little babies.

I was testifying before a Senate committee about this matter of abortion. And after I testified, a young lady met me in the hallway. She was sassy. Her hands were upon her hips, and she said, “Mr. Rogers, you just don’t understand the trauma of having an unwanted pregnancy.” And I said, “Lady, do you think that because somebody traumatizes us that we’re to extinguish them? If so, I ought to throttle you.” She said, “What?” I said, “Suppose I were to jump up, right now, and take you by the throat and strangle you?” I said, “At least you can run and scream for help. What about a little baby in its mother’s womb, completely defenseless, depending upon the God-given instincts of a mother and a father for its protection? And then, its government cooperates in the putting to death of that little baby.” One-third of the lives conceived—almost two million precious, little babies.

Let me read something to you here. A preacher went to a rock concert recently. His name is Dick Marcear. And this is what he wrote: “Rock concerts are not exactly my bag. Usually, you would expect to see them packed with kids, not a group of preachers. But because we were given the free tickets by a group who wanted us to know what was going on, Bob Cross, Scotty Radcliffe, and I attended the KISS and Plasmatics Concert at the Amarillo Civic Center on March 22nd. What we saw and heard literally made us all sick. Look at what we witnessed: a lady whose only clothes were small pieces of tape on her breasts and a G-string. Her main song was called, “(Blank) and Roll.” Now I’m not going to read to you the word, but it’s a four-letter word, a slang word for sexual intercourse. That was her main song. With it, she made an obscene gesture with her middle finger. She took the microphone and acted as if she were having sexual relations with it. The audience was filled with 6-, 8-, and 10-year-old children. She encouraged the audience to make the same gesture and join the singing. Many did.

Then, she took a good television and smashed it with a sledgehammer; then, cut up an electric guitar with a power saw. The couple in front of us drank two bottles of liquor and then smoked their dope openly.

On the floor of the Civic Center, where the majority of the kids stood, dope was freely passed around in plain sight for anyone who wanted to smoke it. One person had lighter fluid sprayed on his back and someone set him afire. The lead singer for KISS said, “Now if you want to set yourself on fire, that’s cool, only, don’t do it to someone else. Anyone want to come up here and set themselves afire and burn for us?” We went to the bathroom, and the floor was covered with blood; and, a syringe was lying there, where someone had shot himself with some kind of dope. The man who was taking tickets recognized me, and asked, ‘What in the world are you doing in a place like this?’ When I told him, he said, ‘Tell parents not to let their kids come to these things. They are terrible.’” There’s some more to this article. I’m not going to read the rest of it.

But that’s not just Amarillo. That’s Memphis, Little Rock; that’s Jacksonville; that’s Omaha. You name it. There’s not a city in America that has not had this type of thing, something like it, or something similar to happen. And many parents are like a worm in a cocoon. They have no idea what is happening to their children. I agree with the man who said, “You let me write the songs that a nation sings, and I don’t care who writes the laws.” And these kids are having this rebellion, and sex, and drugs, by rock music drummed, and drummed, and drummed, and drummed, and drummed, and drummed, and drummed, and drummed into their heads. We’ve made mental zombies out of them. And we sing, “God Bless America.”

Friend, He needs to bless America. Here was a patriot. And the plea of the patriot was for revival—revival. “God, restore the glory that was once ours.”

II. The Possibility of Revival

But the second thing I want you to notice—not only a plea for revival, but I want you to notice the possibility of revival. Look, again, in verse 6: “*Wilt thou not revive us again?*” (Psalm 85:6). I’m so grateful that word *thou* is there, because as long as there is a God in Heaven, I believe there is the possibility of revival.

I have some preacher friends who’ve almost given up. I had a friend say to me, “Adrian, it’s all over. It’s too late. We’ll never get it back. America is gone. We have passed the point of no return. The best thing for us to do today is just start preaching evangelism and get as many people saved as we possibly can before it happens. It’s too late for America. America has passed the point of no return.” I, for one, refuse to believe that. I do not believe that it’s too late for America. And the reason I don’t believe it’s too late for America is because of that word *thou*. “*Wilt thou not revive us again?*” If it depended upon us, indeed, it is too late for America. But as long as there’s a God in the

glory there is hope in my heart for America and for revival.

I tell you, I've studied the history of revival, and I found out that God, in His gracious mercy, has sent revival in the darkest times and has fulfilled that scripture in Romans 5 that says, "Where sin did abound, grace doth much more abound" (Romans 5:20). You think of the revivals in history. Think, for example, of that revival in Israel—Mount Carmel—when Elijah was God's prophet, 450 prophets of God hidden in a cave. The worship of Baal was the worship of the day; wicked Ahab and Jezebel on the throne. There was political corruption, moral corruption, and religious corruption. But there was one man who knew God, and was in contact with God, and had a showdown on Mount Carmel. And he proposed a contest, and he said, "The God that answers by fire, let Him be God" (1 Kings 18:24). And that's the test—not fame or figures, not finances, but fire.

And so they made two altars, and they put two sacrifices upon those altars. The priests of Baal prayed to their pagan god, and there was no answer. Then, Elijah came forth, and he said, "Bring four barrels of water, and pour it on the sacrifice." And they did it. Then, he said, "Bring four more." And they did it. Then, "Four more." Twelve barrelsful of water they poured on that sacrifice. Why was he doing that? The test was fire, and he's saying, "Water." You don't start a fire with water. What was he doing? Ladies and gentlemen, I'll tell you what he was doing. He was showing that, if the fire fell, it would not be spontaneous combustion. What he was showing is this: that a God that can't burn wet wood is no good.

Elijah prayed, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, let it be known this day that I am Thy servant, and that I've done all these things according to Thy Word. O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:36–37). And the Bible said, "*Then the fire of the LORD fell*" (1 Kings 18:38), and God sent a mighty spiritual awakening. And if God could do that on Mount Carmel, God can do that in Memphis.

You think of the revival in the City of Nineveh. Never was there a city that more deserved the judgment of God. They worshiped the fish god. They were a pagan people—a militaristic, heartless people. God had sworn by His holiness that He was going to destroy them. He told His prophet Jonah to go preach judgment: "Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed" (Jonah 3:4). Finally, after Jonah got right and went and preached that message, the entire city repented in sackcloth and ashes; an entire city—from the government right on down. And really, the problem wasn't with Nineveh; it was with the preacher. When God got the preacher right, the city got right. Now if God could send revival to Nineveh, I believe God can send revival to America.

You think of the revival that took place in Jerusalem, the day of Pentecost. What a revival that was! But never was there a place more unlikely for revival—more unlikely that they would have revival in Jerusalem than that we would have revival in Memphis.

And I'll tell you why: In the first place, Jerusalem was gospel-hardened. They'd heard the preaching of the prophets. They'd had the ministry of Jesus Christ, and they had rejected it. Furthermore, the church was discouraged. They were behind closed doors for fear. Furthermore, there was scandal in the church. Judas, one of the chief disciples, had betrayed the Lord. Peter, another of the apostles, had denied the Lord. And besides that, there was never a city where they hated Jesus Christ more, for there they nailed Him on the cross. And yet, on the Day of Pentecost, revival came. And if God could send revival to Jerusalem, God can send revival to us, in this day and in this age.

You think about the Dark Ages. Listen. In what was known as the Dark Ages, the Word of God was unknown—virtually unknown. Few people had ever seen a Bible. And the boys and girls in our Sunday School classes probably know more of the Bible than most of the priests of that day. Dark ages they were, but God raised up Martin Luther; and God raised up Calvin; and God raised up others; and what we call the *Protestant Reformation* was probably one of the greatest revivals this world has ever known, when millions came to Jesus Christ, justified by faith—were born again. And we came out of those Dark Ages. Now if God could do that in those Dark Ages, He can still do it today.

Think about the revival in the 18th Century under Wesley. The French Revolution had taken France. Infidels, agnostics, those with hedonistic philosophy had ruined France. They were taking over England. In England, what you had was a state clergy—many of them gamblers, many of them drunken. There was no Sunday School. The English slave trade was flourishing. And God raised up Wesley and others, and God sent a mighty revival that turned back the tide in England, and saved the day for England. If God did that for England, don't you think God can do for America? I do.

Think of the revival that took place about 15 years ago in Indonesia. So mighty was that revival that miracles were the order of the day. Think of the revival that came to Wales, where, in the Welsh revival, thousands were swept into the churches. "Revival came," one man said, "like an unexpected tornado." And people coming in their boats—fishermen—would fall under conviction as they would draw nigh to the shore, so great was the power of God even hovering over that land. The jail doors were left unlocked, because there were no prisoners. They had to lay off police force. Old debts were paid. Multitudes were swept into the Kingdom of God. Alcoholics were made sober. Criminals were reformed. And Wales was changed and set aglow for Jesus Christ.

Listen. Think of the revival that's going on, right now, in Korea. Did you know that probably the most Christian nation on Earth is no longer America? It's Korea—what we used to think of as pagan Korea. Let me tell you that thousands and thousands are being saved in Korea every week. And they have churches in Korea, now, that would make all of Bellevue Baptist Church look like a Sunday School class. I mean, in Korea: mammoth churches, great churches. I'm not talking about liberal churches. I'm talking

about people who believe the Word of God, who are praising the Lord Jesus. And souls are coming to Christ in Korea. Now if that could happen in Korea, it can happen again in America. And that's the possibility of revival. And I, for one, refuse to say, "There's no hope."

That little Corsican, Napoleon, the French general, was on his way to Moscow. He had 500,000 handpicked soldiers. Soon, he would have Moscow, and he would have the world. Someone said, "Napoleon, you'd better be careful. God may not be with you." Do you know what he said? He said, "God is on the side of the heaviest battalions." And he started toward Moscow. And a snowflake kissed his cheek, and he brushed it away. Then, another snowflake fell, and then another one, and then handfuls, then armfuls, then avalanches of snow. And Napoleon's horses floundered, and reared, and fell in the snow; and his soldiers were frozen there, in the snow. And he turned back with 500,000 men, frozen on the plains of Russia; and it was the beginning of the end of Napoleon. Napoleon was right, when he said that God is on the side of the heaviest battalions, but he failed to understand that God stationed His battalions in the sky. And *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

And so here's the psalmist. He's not looking to circumstances. He's not saying that it's impossible, for *"with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26). *"Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?"* (Psalm 85:6).

III. The Program for Revival

There's a third thing I want you to see. I want you to see, not only the plea for revival, and the possibility of revival, but I want you to see the program for revival. Look, if you will, in verse 4 of this same chapter: *"Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease"* (Psalm 85:4). Look, again, in verse 6: *"Wilt thou not revive us again?"* (Psalm 85:6). *"Turn us."* Now to whom does the *us* refer? Friend, he's talking about God's people.

Let me tell you where the problem is. Are you ready for this? The problem is not in Washington. The problem is not in the slick office of the whiskey baron. The problem is not in the back office and the back room of the pornographer. The problem is not on the streets where the dope pusher is. The problem is not with the humanists. The problem is not in the schools. The problem is inside this room and in the seat that you occupy this morning. You don't believe that, do you? That's where the problem is.

We say, "Oh, if only Hollywood would... Oh, if only Washington would... Oh, if only education would... Oh, if only the liquor people would..." But God says, "If my people—if my people..." Second Chronicles chapter 7, verse 14: *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face,"*—and, listen to this next word—*"and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will*

forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

We've had prayer, but we cannot use prayer as a smokescreen. We want God to bless America. That's our problem. We sing it. We pray it. We say, "God bless America," and He doesn't bless America. Why? Because, we refuse to turn. God says, "...and turn from their wicked ways." What we've been doing is seeking God's hand. We're saying, "God, do something." And God is saying to His people, "Be something." We want God to do something. I hope He doesn't, because the only thing He can do, right now, is judge us. I don't want Him to do anything. I just say, "Please, God, be still for a while until we repent." Because, you see, this scripture says—2 Chronicles 7:14—that we're to seek the face of God, not the hand of God. If we have God's face, we'll have God's hand.

The Bible says, "The LORD's arm is not shortened, that He cannot save; neither is His ear heavy, that He cannot hear: but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hid His face from you" (Isaiah 59:1–2). You see, our sins have hidden His face. Do you know what *revival* is? *Revival* is "the smile of God." That's what *revival* is—"when God smiles upon us." Would to God that we could seek the face of God.

And how do you seek the face of God? You turn from that which is wicked and sinful. We turn from our wicked ways. You want me to tell you how to spell *revival*? It's the first word in verse 14: T-U-R-N—turn, turn. "*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" We have all-night prayer meetings, salty tears, pleas, and all of the rest of it; but friend, it is all to no avail unless we repent. And I'm talking about me. I am talking about you. That is the program for revival: God's people on their face before God, repenting, turning from their sin.

IV. The Product of Revival

Now there's one other thing I want you to see, and I'll be finished. I want you to see the product of revival. Look, again, at this prayer of a patriot, in verse 6: "*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*" (Psalm 85:6). That's the product of revival—so simple. What is *revival*? "Rejoicing in our great God." Not rejoicing in the abundance of our products, our gross national product; not rejoicing in the might of our military; and not rejoicing in the beauty of our cities, the cleanliness of our streets, the culture of our museums and universities; oh, but "*that thy people might rejoice in thee.*"

So many times, we want revival for revival's sake. We want revival for America's sake. We want revival for the denomination's sake. We want revival for the church's sake. That's why we don't have it. When we come to the place where we want to rejoice in Him—"that thy people may rejoice in thee"—when it is God that we seek, God that we

hunger for, God that we long for, we'll have revival.

Now be honest: Do you have a burning hunger in your heart to know Him better? Or, are you just looking for some way out of trouble? I tell you, my friend, when we get hungry for Him, when we come to the place where we want Him, when He is the all-consuming desire of our hearts, when we yearn for Him, that we might rejoice in Him, we'll have revival.

Let me tell you how revival comes. It comes in three stages.

A. **The Weeping Stage**

First of all, there's a time of weeping—weeping, a time of brokenness. And God knows we have plenty to weep about. There's the coldness of our heart, the indifference of our churches; there's the lostness of our neighbors, the sinfulness of our government. God knows that we have enough to weep about, when we're broken with Him. God says, *"I've seen thy tears... I have heard thy prayer"* (Isaiah 38:5). Oh, would to God, would to God, in this world that's being baptized with sin that we could baptize it with tears. "A broken and a contrite spirit, thou will not despise, O God" (Psalm 51:17). The first step of revival is weeping.

B. **The Reaping Stage**

The second step is reaping—that is, seeing souls saved. When God's people get right with Him, when they truly seek His face, not only is God going to change them, but God is going to start to save multitudes of people. It's not the Lord's will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But He's waiting on His people to get right first. And when judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), and when we put our house in order, this unsaved world is coming to Jesus Christ by the millions. I believe that with all of my heart and soul. When the Church gets right, we're not going to just see scores of people saved here on Sunday; we're going to see hundreds and, bless God, thousands of people saved in this church, in that church, in that church; in this city, in that city, in that city; and millions are going to come to Jesus Christ.

Don't you want to see that? Don't you want to see the golden grain laid at the feet of Jesus, the Lord of the harvest? Don't you want to see great multitudes? Wouldn't it be wonderful to see, in the City of Memphis, Tennessee, 20,000, 30,000, 40,000, 50,000, 100,000, 200,000, 300,000 coming to Jesus? Do you think that's possible? Friend, I believe it's probable when God's people get right. I really do. That's not rhetoric. I tell you, *when there is a weeping revival, there soon is a reaping revival*. *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:6). When we go forth with tears, we will come back with joy.

C. The Rejoicing Stage

But I want to tell you what real revival is. Those are just precursors of revival. First of all, a weeping revival; secondly, a reaping revival; and, thirdly, a rejoicing revival—weeping, reaping, rejoicing. Listen. *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” “Weeping may endure for a [season], but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). “Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”*

Do you know what revival is? Listen to me. I'll tell you what revival is. Revival is a burning, passionate, blazing, emotional love for Jesus Christ. Now folks, that was a good place for an *amen*. That's what revival is: a burning, passionate, blazing, emotional love for Jesus Christ. It's not just that the government is running smoothly. It's not just that the interest rates go down. It's not just that the *commies* back off. It is that we are in love with the Lord Jesus. And here, was a plea of a patriot: *“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?”* That's the product of revival.

Conclusion

Now pay attention. On the eve of the 207th birthday of our nation, the call of the hour is for revival. I say it. I don't stammer when I say it. I mean it with all of my heart. I'm as convinced as I stand here. Are you listening? Pay attention. The only thing that can save America is revival. Do you agree with that? The only thing. I've thought it through. This is not off the top of my head. It is from the depth of my spirit. The only thing that can save America is revival. And the only people who can start revival are God's people.

Now if we can't have a revival in the world, let's have revival in America. And if we can't have revival in America, let's have revival in Memphis. And if we can't have revival in Memphis, let's have revival in Bellevue. And if we can't have revival in Bellevue, let's have revival in your family. And if we can't have revival in your family, let's have revival in you. *I'm only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do and can do, by God's grace, I will do.*

Lord, start a revival, and let it begin in me. It's time that we said it and meant it, prayed it and felt it: “God bless America.” *“Wilt thou not revive thy people again: that they may rejoice in thee?”* Let's bow in prayer. Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Would you pray that prayer: “Lord, Lord, begin a revival. Start a revival in my heart. God, forgive my coldness, my indifference, my laziness, my fear, my unbelief, my lack of commitment, my cowardliness, my worldliness, and my greed for things.” Would you pray, “Lord, give me a reckless, daring abandon; a blazing, passionate, emotional love for the Lord Jesus. O Lord, help me to love you more than life, more than wealth, and more than pleasure. Lord, start a revival in my heart.”

Freedom from Fear

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 4, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 91:5

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;”

PSALMS 91:5

Outline

Introduction

- I. Discover the Secret Place
 - A. We Don't Come to Inform God
 - B. We Don't Come to Impress God
 - C. We Come to Invite God
- II. Enjoy the Sacred Place
- III. Rest in the Safest Place
 - A. The Situation of Our Fortress
 - B. The Sufficiency of Our Fortress
 - C. The Stability of Our Fortress
 - D. The Security of Our Fortress

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles and find Psalm 91, and when you've found it, look up here and let me remind you one more time that those 56 men who signed that Declaration of Independence at the very selfsame time signed a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. Now, we have some revisionist historians who for some reason want to forget that, but these men had such a desire for freedom that it drove them to put their life and property in jeopardy. But, they did this as they signed it with these words—and you listen to them: “for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”—did you hear that?—“with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” They said—listen: “We are coming out from under the tyranny of Great Britain, and we are not afraid of the king's army, his navy, because we are placing ourselves under the hand of Almighty God.”

Now, today the hearts of many Americans are filled with fear. There's something that's very disquieting as we see prosperity growing and growing, and we see the spiritual barometer dropping, and we see the floodgates of immorality like a broken

cesspool flooding America, and it seems as though we've eaten the very bottom out of the garbage can. We say, "What is about to happen?" There's sort of a foreboding, and many of us are wondering what's going to happen with Y2K, what is the new millennium going to bring, and we are filled with fear, and we ought not to be. In Psalm 91, look if you will, in verse 5: "*Thou shalt not be afraid*" (Psalm 91:5). Just underscore that: "*Thou shalt not be afraid.*" On this July the 4th, I want to speak to you about "Freedom from Fear," and I want to talk to you about a new declaration of independence and a new declaration of dependence upon Almighty God. We need now as America to have a spiritual revival. There's a new tyrant in the land. Very frankly, he is Satan. What we need to do is to declare our independence from him and our dependence upon the Almighty. And, again I want to remind you that Psalm 91 is a wonderful Psalm for this.

Ann Landers is someone whose name is familiar to all Americans, and she receives a great number of letters, 10,000 letters every month, people asking her for her advice and telling her about their problems. And, Ann Landers was asked was there one problem that predominates, is there one problem that seems to be above all the other problems that people write you about. And, she said, indeed there is. The problem is fear. Here's what she said: "The one problem above all others seems to be fear. People are afraid of losing their health, their wealth, their loved ones, and people are afraid of life itself." And, many Americans are living lives filled with fear.

Now, let's talk just a little bit about fear as we're talking about "Freedom from Fear," on this Fourth of July. I think it's very foolish to tell people there's nothing to fear but fear itself. President Roosevelt said that back in 1933, and that was a good line. But, very frankly, there are some things we need to be afraid of. There are some normal dangers. You ought to be afraid of rattlesnakes. You ought to be afraid of drunken drivers. You ought to be afraid of muggers who are on the street. Those are normal and natural fears that God has given us for self-protection. And then, if you don't know the Lord, I want to tell you, very frankly, you've got a lot to fear. You're going to die and go to Hell. I can't put it any more nicely than that. Jesus said, "Fear not him that is able to destroy the body but not able to destroy the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell" (Matthew 10:28). That's what Jesus said. And, the Bible says, in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 31, "*It is a fearful thing*"—a fearful thing—"to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). It really is. I've often said that *God is America's only hope, and God is America's biggest threat*. "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.*"

So, there are normal fears, and then there's the fear of death and Hell. And then, there is the wonderful and productive fear of the Lord. Proverbs 1, verse 7, says, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*" (Proverbs 1:7). Simple. You don't even have a modicum of good sense if you don't fear the Lord, and that doesn't mean a

cringing fear of God. *The fear of the Lord is just love on its knees. And, the one who fears God the most loves God the best.* But, there is an unproductive, unhealthy fear that debilitates and destroys. The Bible calls that the spirit of fear. Second Timothy 1, verse 7: “*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7). And, that’s what I want to talk to you about today on this Fourth of July: how we can have a future and a freedom from fear.

Now, let me look in this Psalm with you, and this Psalm teaches us that no matter what happens to America, no matter how dark the hour may be, we can say with confidence, “I will not fear.” A wise man says tomorrow has two handles: one is fear, and one is faith, and you can take it by either handle. I choose to make a declaration of independence from Satan, a declaration of dependence upon Almighty God, and this Fourth of July I just want to announce that declaration. Three things I want to lay on your heart as we look in this Psalm this morning, and three things that you need to do if you would face tomorrow and a new millennium free from fear, no matter what happens to the American republic.

I. Discover the Secret Place

Number one: We need to discover the secret place. Look, if you will now, in verse 1: “*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*” (Psalm 91:1). Now, when you were a kid, did you have a hiding place? Maybe, if you disobeyed your mom or dad, you ran there to hide, or maybe you just wanted to get away with your fantasies somewhere; you had a secret place, a hiding place. Well, we still need one of those. We need some place to go; we need some sort of a refuge, some sort of a secret place, some getaway. Some people would like to have a cabin in the woods where they could get away to, some place by the lake, maybe something like the President has, some Camp David somewhere where we can just go and be alone, just sort of hide out. Well, we have one—we have one. Look at it: “*He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*”

The Lord Jesus also talked about that secret place, and He taught us to go to it every day, and He said there in the Sermon on the Mount—you remember it: “*When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and...shut thy door, pray to thy Father...*”—listen—“*pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly*” (Matthew 6:6). We all have a secret place. I’ve been in the secret place this morning. Have you? You see, look, we need to discover the secret place. Why did Jesus tell us to go into the closet

and shut our door and pray for our Father? Why do we do that? Why do we pray that way? Why do we come to God in prayer?

A. We Don't Come to Inform God

Well, let me tell you, first of all, we don't come to inform God. When we pray, He already knows everything. Somebody said, "Has it ever occurred to you that nothing ever occurs to God?" He knows everything; He knows the beginning from the end. Jesus said, "Your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). So, we certainly don't come to inform God. I've heard people sometimes try to inform God in their prayers. I heard a person praying the other day. He said, "Lord, it says in Proverbs *da da da da da da*." He was telling God how He could find it in the Bible if God needed it.

B. We Don't Come to Impress God

And, we don't come to inform God, and we don't come to impress God. Jesus said, "When you pray, don't use vain repetition as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 6:7). I've got good news for you. You don't have to be Shakespeare Jr. in order to pray. You don't have to use great flowery words. You can't impress God with your little memorized phrases and poetry when you pray.

C. We Come to Invite God

We don't come to inform God; we don't come to impress God. Why do we pray? We come to invite God. Just invite God. Say, "God, come into my heart, into my life; take control of my life." That's the secret place, when you get alone with God, and you shut the door, and you say, "Oh, God, come now. I invite you to take control of my life." That's so wonderful. Have you ever thought about prayer why we ask God to do what He always wants to do? And, God is almighty, and yet He has somehow limited Himself by our prayers. One man said God never moves at all except in response to the prayers of His people. He could do it without us. We couldn't do it without Him.

I've often used this illustration. Sometimes flying across the country in a private plane the pilot will say to me, "Do you want to fly the plane?" Now, we're sitting here side by side, and I say yes, and he says, "all right," and I take control, and you know, I'm doing it all... Folks, listen. Don't ever fly with me if that guy's not there. I mean, don't ever trust me to do that. But, we're sitting there, and we're flying along, having wonderful fellowship. Now, the point: He could do it without me; I couldn't do it without him; but I enjoy him letting me do it with him. There's a bonding, a fellowship.

That's the way prayer is. God can do it without us. We couldn't do it without Him. But, the Bible says we are laborers together with God. And so, if you want to live a life without fear, if you want to have real freedom from that tyrant the devil, just declare your

dependence upon the Almighty and find that secret place day by day, and say, “Dear Lord, I am dependent upon You.” You see, the Bible says that when you do that you know what will happen? You’ll *“abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”* You see that? Look there in verse 1. The Bible says when you go there you will *“abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”*

Now, let me just tell you something very obvious. You have to be very close to someone to be under his shadow, don’t you? I mean you have to be very close to someone to be in his shadow, and God wants us to be so dependent upon Him that we just seek out that secret place. All right, you got that?

II. Enjoy the Sacred Place

Here’s the first thing: Discover the secret place. Now, secondly: Enjoy the sacred place. Look now in verse 1: *“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust”* (Psalm 91:1–2). Now, what the Psalmist is talking about here when he says the secret place, he’s really talking about the sacred place, the Holy of Holies. Did you know that when you come into the secret place you as a child of God are coming into a sacred place, the Holy of Holies?

John Phillips said something that so blessed my heart. He said, “Can you imagine a man from Moab—you remember the Moabites were people with a curse upon them, and they lived hard up against Israel, and the Moabites would see the Israelites out there in the wilderness with the tabernacle—imagine a Moabite coming to an Israelite, and that Moabite sees that tabernacle there with the white curtains, the curtain wall around the tent, and that Moabite says to that Israelite, “What is that?” “Oh,” he says, “that’s where we Jews, that’s where we worship God.” “Well,” said the Moabite, I’d like to go in there.” “Oh, you’re a Moabite. You have a curse upon you. You couldn’t go in there. You would have to be born again an Israelite.” “Oh, okay. Well, if I were born again an Israelite, there’s another room there, there’s sort of an inner court; I think I’d like to go in there.” “Oh,” he said, “even if you were an Israelite, you couldn’t go in there. You’d have to be a Levite; you’d have to be of the tribe of Levi.” “Well,” he says, “if I were a Levite, I would go in there and I’d make sacrifices.” “Oh, no, no, you wouldn’t. You’d have to be ordained a priest to make those sacrifices.” “Oh, well, what’s that other room back there?” “Oh, that’s the secret place; that’s the Holy of Holies. That’s where the Shekinah glory of God dwells. That’s where the Ark of the Covenant is. That’s where the very presence of God is.” “Oh,” he says, “well, then, I would go in there.” But, he said, “Oh no, you wouldn’t. You wouldn’t go in there even if you were an Israelite, even if you were a Levite, and even if you were of the house of Aaron; you wouldn’t go in there unless you were the high priest.” “Well,” he says, “if I were the high priest, I’d go in

there three times a day.” He said, “Oh no, you wouldn’t. If you were the high priest, you would only go in there one time a year with a basin of blood to put on the Mercy Seat.”

But, friend, let me tell you something. Because of Jesus, you and I can go in there every day and abide there; we abide there. That’s what he said. We abide there. You see, when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn. What was the veil of the temple? The veil of the temple was that thick curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies is the secret place, and that secret place becomes the sacred place, and when Jesus died, there was an earthquake, and the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom, and a way was made because of that earthquake for people to go right into the Holy of Holies. It was highly symbolic, for the Bible teaches us that the veil was the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, the Bible says by his death He’s made a way for us (Hebrews 10:19–20). You can read it in the Book of Hebrews. He’s made a way for us into the Holy of Holies.

You know what that veil was like? That veil had colors. That veil was done, first of all, on white linen. White linen represents the purity of Jesus Christ. All the veil was a picture of Jesus. This is the reason we say you can find Jesus anywhere in the Bible. I’m talking about the Old Testament now. That white curtain was a picture of the purity of Jesus. He was absolutely spotlessly perfect and pure, wasn’t He? And then, it had blue. Blue is the color of the sky, because He is the Son of God from Heaven. And so, the veil had blue on it. But, not only did that veil have blue, but it had crimson red, and that crimson red, that crimson red represents the humanity of Jesus. It speaks of blood. The very name Adam means red, and He’s the second Adam, the last Adam, and so He’s the Son of God from Heaven. He is the Almighty, but He is also the God-man. He is totally human. What a wonderful person is Jesus: perfectly sinless, the God from Heaven, and a man from Earth, the virgin-born Son of God. But, He’s also King of kings and Lord of lords. There was one more color. There was the white, there was the blue, there was the crimson, but there was one more color. You know what it was? It was purple—royal purple. And, that was on that veil. How do you get purple? Well, you just take white and then put on that white some blue and overlay that blue with red and you have purple. Just take the blue and the scarlet and put them together and you have that royal purple.

Friend, what a picture of Jesus! When you have that purple and look at it, you can’t tell where the blue begins and the red ends. You see, when you look at Jesus, you cannot tell where His Deity begins nor His humanity ends. He becomes Heaven’s King. Isn’t that wonderful? That veil that represents the Lord Jesus Christ. And, friend, when He died, through His torn body you and I have a way into the Holy of Holies. On this Fourth of July, let me tell you something. If you would have a life without fear, you declare your dependence on Him, and you find the secret place; and when you find the

secret place, you're going to enjoy the sacred place. There's nothing more wonderful than to go in and have fellowship with Heaven's king, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

III. Rest in the Safest Place

Now, here's the third thing I want to say this morning. Not only do you discover the secret place, and then you enjoy the sacred place, but, friend, that's when you rest in the safest place. Look now in verse 2: *"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust"* (Psalm 91:2). Everything else is going to come apart.

Jim, you remember when we went to Romania, and one of the things that we did when we went to Romania was to go to Bucharest, and there we visited the palace, the unfinished palace and fortress of that wicked and malevolent man named Nikolai Ceausescu. I can never forget that place. That thing was absolutely incredible. He began to work on that palace, and he spent an incredible amount of money. He had 24,000 workers working day and night to finish his palace. This palace was so monstrous, just in the presidential suite alone it had 1,000 rooms. It was done of white marble, had 14,000 chandeliers, it cost, unfinished, 7 billion dollars—I didn't say million, 7 billion dollars. You could go in there, 14-carat gold leaf was all over the walnut walls, and doors were intricately carved, and the great sweeping staircases and so forth. It was unfinished when we went through there, and to my knowledge, it still hasn't been finished. There was a reception room that had a hand-woven carpet—hand-woven—that weighed 2 ½ tons. Money was no object to this man.

Imagine now, they'd been building this thing year after year, 24,000 workers, seven days a week. One shift would go off, and another shift would come on. But, the thing that impressed me was that underneath that palace was a bunker. And, old Ceausescu, in case there was any insurrection, any rising up, he had that bunker prepared down deep underground where 30 families could live for 10 years without ever coming up—down under the ground. And, it was to be finished in six months, but a revolution took place, and those dear Romanians there in Timisoara, and they began to say in the face of this tyrant, when they tried to carry away their pastor, they surrounded their pastor, they surrounded the church, and they wouldn't let the soldiers get by, and after a while one of them began to sing a song that praised God, and another one began to say, "There's a God! There is a God! There is a God!" And, they took up the shout. The soldiers came in with their water cannons. The water cannons were destroyed. The soldiers began to shoot the people down. Men would unbutton their shirts and hold open their chests, and say, "I'll take your bullet." And, a revolution was on the way.

Old Ceausescu, who had that unfinished bunker beneath the ground, went to

Budapest to make a speech and to make an oration like he had done. He was standing up there, and somebody yells out, “Murderer!” Somebody else shook their fists. He’d never seen that. He started to flee. He had a helicopter on the roof. It took him away. It landed, and he got in an armored vehicle and began to flee. But, he’d been so paranoid he would never let his soldiers put a full tank of gas in the vehicle lest they would get away, and it ran out of gas. Here’s old Ceausescu, and he’s out of gas. He has to get out of that armored vehicle and hail a cab, and an ordinary cab driver picks up this man, this great, vaunted, atheistic, ungodly, lascivious, vile, wicked man trying to flee in a little cab. There he had his underground bunker where he was going to stay for as long as he wants, 10 years or more, with all this food and water and so forth. Of course, they catch his little cab. On Christmas day, 10 men put him in front of a firing squad; 10 men put 160 bullets in him—160 bullets. Ceausescu, the great tyrant, is dead. He had a hiding place, but it wasn’t a good one. He had a refuge, but what a failure was his refuge!

Let me tell you about a real one. Listen to this one here—I love it: *“I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust”* (Psalm 91:2). Now, I want you to look at this very carefully, because there’s a great blessing here if you’ll just slow down with me. Four different names for God are used here. In verse 1, God is called the Most High. In verse 1, he is called the Almighty. In verse 2, He is called the Lord. And, in verse 2, He is called God. Now, remember, what is happening is the Psalmist is describing his fortress, and it’s almost as if these are the four components of his fortress.

Now, I want you to look at this fortress now. What we’re talking about, folks, is a future free of fear. We’re talking about a declaration of independence from Satan and a declaration of dependence on Almighty God. Now, if you want a fortress, there are four things that are necessary for a fortress, and these four things are found in the Lord.

A. The Situation of Our Fortress

First of all, think about the situation of a fortress—the situation of the fortress. Notice he says, *“in the...place of the most High.”* Now, remember, it’s God who is your fortress. He’s not with you in your fortress; He is your fortress. And, the situation is the Most High. The word here is *Elyon*, and it means, “the Most High God, the possessor of Heaven and Earth.” That means He owns everything, and therefore everything is beneath Him. Your fortress is in the highest place. You are seated with Him in the heavenlies. Everybody knows that the highest place is the safest place, and we’re seated with Him. Go on down to verse 14 and it makes it even more clear: *“Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high,”*—notice this—*“because he hath known my name”* (Psalm 91:14). What is His name? *Elyon*. His name means the Most High. And so, what is the situation of your fortress? Folks, we’re

seated in the heavenlies.

B. The Sufficiency of Our Fortress

Now, the second thing the fortress needs is not only a situation but sufficiency; think of the sufficiency of your fortress. You see, a fortress, in order for it to be worthwhile and secure, it has to be self-contained. You have to have everything that you need on the inside, and the name for Almighty is the word *Shaddai*, and that means not only the living God, but the giving God, the God in whom is all our necessities, everything we need. Satan can't starve you out when you abide here, folks. God just keeps on giving and giving and giving.

In England there used to be a man named Jack the Huckster—Jack the Huckster. He was a devoted Christian. Some thought him eccentric. He had a song that he sang all the time: "I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all. I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." And, he would sing this over and over again. Some would ask him, "Jack, do you ever doubt?" He would say, "I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." They would say, "Jack, do you ever have any ups and downs?" He would just say, "I am a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." And, they said to him, "Jack, prove your salvation"; the people at the church asked him to do this. And, he said, "I am just a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." And, they said, "Jack, do you ever get proud?" He said, "I am just a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." They asked him, "Jack, what do you do to have your needs met?" He said, "I am just a poor sinner and nothing at all, but Jesus Christ is my all in all." That's it, folks. That is it.

I was talking with a young preacher one time, he said God called him to preach, and he said, "I'm sorry. God wants me to go to school, but I just don't have the money." I said, "Well, let me ask you a question. If I could get you a millionaire to write your expenses, would you go?" He said, "Boy, would I." I said, "Well, you have the One who owns the world." Listen. Where God guides, He provides, does He not?

C. The Stability of Our Fortress

Let's think of the situation of our fortress: He's the Most High. Think of the sufficiency of our fortress: He is *El Shaddai*; He is the giving God. And then, think with me about the stability of our fortress. Notice here, in verse 2, He's called the Lord. Do you see that? That word is the name for God; it is Yahweh. It means the great I Am, and it speaks of the stability of our fortress. You see, God never has a beginning, and He never has an ending. He cannot change; He is forever and ever, and He cannot change. Now, some fortresses can be dismantled. I have visited in Israel Belvoir, which was a Crusader fortress, but the ruins are just there. But, this fortress, our God, remains forever and

ever and ever. You see, to be safe you need a fortress that is absolutely unchanging. That's the reason the Psalmist, I believe it was Moses, said, "The Lord is my fortress."

A young preacher came to a church, and you know in these country churches that we have, we preachers talk about what they call a bell-cow deacon. He's the guy who was there when the preacher got there, and he'll be there when the preacher leaves, and he's sort of the guy that runs everything. So, this bell-cow deacon said to this preacher, said, "Look, I want you to know who I am. My name is so-and-so. I'm the one who makes the motions around here, recommends the budget and so forth. I just want you to know who I am. And, if you just work with me, we'll get along, and you just trust me. This young preacher had a lot of courage. He said to this deacon, he said, "Look, all this time I've been trusting the Lord and looking to Him to meet my needs. Now," he said, "suppose I were to transfer my trust from Him to you and put my trust in you, and then you up and died on me, what would I do?" Oh, friend, you know, in a few months, that man had died. No, God is the One who never changes. We put our faith, our trust, in Him.

D. The Security of Our Fortress

Now, here's the fourth thing about our fortress. Think not only about the situation, He's the Most High; the sufficiency, He is the living, giving God; think about the stability, He is Yahweh, He never changes. And then, friend, this God is a God who is eternal. He is *Elohim*, and that speaks of the security of our fortress. *Elohim*—do you know what the word *Elohim* means? It's the word that's used of God when He created the world. It means that He is the Almighty. There's absolutely nothing He cannot do, and He is the One who is our fortress. Do you know what you need to do in the midst of your problems? You need to do exactly what the Psalmist said here in this Psalm. I am going to find my security in Him. I'm going to find my sufficiency in Him. I'm going to find my stability in Him. I am going to find my all in all, like old Jack, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, he mentions in the rest of this Psalm things that are not going to happen to him. Notice what he says: "*Surely he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler*" (Psalm 91:3)—that's deception. And, look, if you will, in verse 5: "*Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day*" (Psalm 91:5)—that's death. Notice in verse 7: "*A thousand shall fall at thy side, ten thousand at thy right hand*" (Psalm 91:7)—that's destruction. Notice in verse 10: "*There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling*" (Psalm 91:10)—that's disease. Notice in verse 12: "*They shall bear thee up in their hands,*"—the angels—"lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:12)—that's disaster. Notice in verse 13: "*Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder*" (Psalm 91:13)—that's the devil and his demons. What's he saying? He's saying, "Listen. When you come to God, when you discover the

secret place and then you abide in the sacred place, you're going to find that is the safest place. God is going to take care of you. God is going to give you a future free from fear."

You say, "Now, wait a minute, pastor. Wait a minute. Do you mean that I'll never have any death, I'll never have any disease, I can't die, nothing can happen to me?" No, that's not what this means. As a matter of fact, the devil tried to twist it to mean that and quoted it to Jesus. He said, "Just jump off the pinnacle of the temple. He'll give His angels charge over thee, lest thou dash thy foot upon the stone" (Matthew 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11). You know, the devil loves to twist and pervert Scripture. You have to understand this. What he's saying is that nothing—nothing—can come to you, but what it comes with God's allowance, and God works it together for His glory and your good.

Conclusion

Charles Spurgeon said this—and I'm going to close with this, but I want you to listen to it. He says, "It is impossible..."—listen—"it is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. The most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is no ill, but it is good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him. Sickness is his medicine. Reproach is his honor. Death is his gain. No evil, in the strict sense of the word, can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is in such a case. He is secured where others are in peril. He lives where others die." Isn't that great? Isn't that great?

Well, I don't know what's going to happen to America. I don't know what the future holds. I don't know about Y2K. I don't know about the state of your health or your finances. But, I'm going to tell you, precious friend, do you know what you need to do right now? Listen. You declare your independence from Satan and declare with all of your heart your dependence upon the Almighty, and you will discover that the secret place becomes the sacred place, and it's the safest place you could ever be. This Psalm is a great Psalm, and I hope it will be yours for the Fourth of July.

Pardon with Punishment

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 3, 1985

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 99:8

“Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.”

PSALMS 99:8

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Pardon of Sin
- II. The Penalty of Sin
 - A. The Example of Moses
 - B. The Example of David

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bible tonight. I want you to turn to Psalm 99, and I want us to look at what I consider to be a curious verse, true but unusual, and a truth that we tend to overlook. Psalm 99 and verse 8: *“Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though...”*—and just underscore the word *though*—*“though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.”* That is, in plain English, “You chastise them, and You corrected them, and You dealt in judgment with the wicked things that they did.” *“Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy”* (Psalm 99:8–9).

Now, I hope that you know that if you sin, you suffer. That suffering follows wrong like echo follows song on and on and on. If you sin, you suffer. As surely as night follows day, as surely as my name is Adrian Rogers, if you sin, you suffer. Now, someone will say, “But now, wait a minute, pastor, I sinned, but I asked God to forgive me, and so that cancels it all out, and I don’t have to suffer.” Wrong, wrong. I want you to learn something here that’s very, very important. When God forgives us, that does not necessarily mean that the consequences of that sin are taken away. I’m talking to Christians now. I’m talking to born-again people. Somehow we get the idea that we can just sin, then after we sin, we get on our knees and we say “Now, God, I’m sorry; God, forgive me; God, have mercy upon me.” And, He does forgive, and when you’re sorry,

He will cleanse, and He will forgive every sin. But, don't think, dear friend, when that happens, that you're finished with Him. It's not necessarily so.

You see, when you're cleansed, the consequences are not necessarily removed. Now, you need to understand what we call *chastisement* is. When God chastises us, God is not getting even with us. And, when you punish your children, are you trying to get even with them? Well, I mean, most of the time. Most of the time, you're not trying to get even with them. When you punish your children, what are you trying to do? No matter how you punish them—I mean, whether you do it with the rod, whether you do with the tone of the voice, whether you restrict their privileges, or whatever you do—what are you trying to do with your children? You're trying to teach them a lesson. You're trying to make better people out of them. You're trying to grow them, mature them, strengthen them, and establish them. You're trying to make them the kind of children that can be happy with themselves, happy with their parents, happy with their environment, and happy with their God. And so, you love them so much you chastise them. Exactly as the Bible says in the Book of Hebrews: *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”* (Hebrews 12:6).

Now, when you do that, you're not getting even with them; you are correcting them. Now, God is doing the same thing with us when we sin, and He brings chastisement. He's not trying to get even with us—He's not. It's not retribution; it is correction. And so, you're going to find out from this passage of Scripture and some other Scriptures that we're going to show you that when God deals with you in love, the same love that pardons you may punish you at the same time. And, you're being pardoned and punished at the same time. And, because you've been pardoned does not mean that you will not be punished. Just as a person may get a wound, and that wound will heal, the scar will remain. And, just as God may forgive your sin and heal your transgression, yet the scars of that transgression will remain.

I. The Pardon of Sin

And so, what is forgiveness? Now, look at this verse of Scripture here: *“Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them”* (Psalm 99:8). What is forgiveness? How do I know when I'm forgiven? The Bible says, in 1 John 1, verse 9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). How do I know when I am forgiven? Well, I know that I'm forgiven when the sense of God's presence and God's peace fills my heart, when I know that nothing is between my soul and the Savior, when I feel that inflow of God's love, when I feel God saying through His Word, “My child, you have confessed. I will keep My Word.” God speaks peace to my heart.

Then, that is forgiveness and that sin is forgiven. I am as forgiven when I have that

sense of His pardon and His presence as I ever will be. But, still God may punish me after He forgives me. Look again at this verse of Scripture: *“Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions”* (Psalm 99:8). Now, Charles Haddon Spurgeon called this, “pardon with punishment.” “Thou forgave them, and yet You took vengeance on their inventions,” the things they did wrong.

II. The Penalty of Sin

Now, you remember when you were a kid and did something wrong, and your dad didn't punish you. Maybe he didn't find out about it, or maybe he did find out about it, but on that particular time he, for some reason, was too busy, or forgot, and didn't punish you, which was very rare probably. Do you remember that? You didn't feel good about it; you felt lucky. You see, God here doesn't want us just to feel lucky, like we lucked out and that He didn't punish us. God wants us to feel good, and sometimes that feeling good may mean indeed that we have to be punished in order to feel good—I mean, that we have to know that God has dealt with us and God has chastised us. Now, what I'm trying to say is that God's mercy often leaves certain penalties unremoved even though God has forgiven us.

A. The Example of Moses

I was preaching this morning about Moses. You remember the body of Moses? Look intelligent. You remember up on Mount Nebo? Okay, you remember that? Okay, God forgave Moses, and yet Moses died on Mount Nebo; God chastised Moses, and Moses' chastisement was so severe that he died prematurely. Moses didn't die of sickness. Moses did not die of accident. The Bible says, *“When he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated”* (Deuteronomy 34:7). And yet, he died there. He did not die unforgiven. He did not die because God was holding a grudge. He did not die because God was getting even with him. God chastised Moses even though Moses had been forgiven. “Thou forgavest their sin and took vengeance upon their inventions.”

B. The Example of David

I'll give you another example of this, what I'm talking about. Think of David, and by the way, let's just turn to 2 Samuel chapter 12, I believe, and let's look there at the passage that deals with David. Now, remember that David was a man after God's own heart. David was the Old Testament counterpart of a New Testament Christian. We would say that David was a saved person, we'll meet David in Heaven, and yet David did a terrible thing. He committed the sin of adultery with a woman named Bathsheba, and in order to try to conceal that sin he committed another sin. He committed the sin of manslaughter with Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, of whom Bathsheba was the wife. And, he had Uriah

killed on the battlefield, trying to cover up his horrible crime. And, Nathan the prophet called upon David, and Nathan the prophet told David that God was going to judge him.

Now, I want you to know that there was a child that was conceived out of that adultery. And, the child was sick, and David said to the Lord, “Lord, I know I’ve sinned, and God, I want you to forgive me.” And then, David said to the Lord, “Lord, please let that child live.” But, I want you to notice what happened here in the Scripture, in 2 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 12: *“For thou didst it secretly:”*—here’s what Nathan is saying to David—*“but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD.”* Now, watch this and put a star by it: *“And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die”* (2 Samuel 12:12–13). Now, when he says, *“The Lord...hath put away thy sin,”* it means that David has been forgiven. David has been pardoned. David has repented. And, while David was a great sinner, David was a great repentor.

But now, look at the next verse, verse 14, and the first word, *“Howbeit,”*—that is, “nevertheless”—*“because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth”* (2 Samuel 12:14–16)—and so on. And, David began to pray and to say, “Lord, let that child live.” But, God had passed sentence, and that child died. God had forgiven David, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Nathan said to David, “God has put away your sin,” and yet God in judgment brought deep sorrow to the house of David.

Now, why did God do that? Well, Nathan the prophet said one of the reasons. The clue is right here. He said, “You have given occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme.” Do you know the worst thing that could have happened? Would have been for David to have done this terrible sin, and after David had done this terrible sin for God to say, “Okay, David, I’ll just forgive you, and now I’ll just start blessing you right now,” and God just to put His blessings on all of this sin. Everybody else would look and say “Well, what kind of God is that? What kind of holiness is that? What kind of righteousness is that?” And so, God, on the one hand, forgave David, but on the other hand, the same God that forgave David made an example of David and chastised David. He forgave his iniquity. But, He took vengeance upon His inventions—Psalm 99 and verse 8.

Oh, let me just give you another example. What about Christians who waste their lives? I speak to so many people—young, middle-aged people, or mature people—and they tell me, “You know, preacher, I was saved when I was a kid, but I didn’t live for God. I don’t know why. I was just kind of wild and wooly, and I didn’t live for God. I was

saved. I know I was saved. I remember that God truly saved me, and in my heart I've always loved God, but I just didn't live for God." You wasted your youth. Well, friend, I don't care how much you repent, no amount of repentance is going to turn the dial back and enable you to relive that youth. It is gone. It's gone. And, that's part of the chastisement. No repentance is going to turn back the dial on the clock or the pages on the calendar. That's the reason the Bible says, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). I am everlastingly grateful that God saved me as a young teenage boy, and right after God saved me I got serious about this matter of serving the Lord. And, I am everlasting grateful that I began, young people, to date a girl who loved God, and the kind of a girl that I could pray with, and the kind of a girl who at high school was interested with me in leading other people to Jesus Christ. And, I can remember Joyce and I there in our high school together leading prayer meetings during lunch, off campus, walking across the street and borrowing a neighbors yard, and saying, "Can we use your little patio area here to have services at noontime and to praise the Lord?"

And, I'm so grateful that, even though I know I've failed the Lord in so many ways, from my youth up I've had the joy and the privilege of serving the Lord. Somebody said, "Oh, if only old age could, if only youth would." And, you young people, and you young adults here, I want to tell you, dear friend, that if you waste your life, and then you come to God, and you say, "God, forgive me, cleanse me, pardon me," God will forgive you, God will cleanse you, God will pardon you, but you'll still suffer for a wasted life.

You will still suffer for a wasted life. Suppose a man goes out and gets drunk and gets in an automobile accident, turns his automobile over, and cuts off his arm, and then later on he wakes up in the hospital, and he looks over there, and there's no arm, and he says, "Oh, God, what a fool I was—so ignorant, so stupid! Oh, God, have mercy! God, forgive me." Will God forgive him? Certainly He'll forgive him, but I'll tell you, all his life he'll only have one arm. I don't care how forgiving he is. And, you cannot take away the consequences of sin.

Galatians chapter 6 and verse 7 says, "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). You know, there are people who are asking God to make them healthy. They say, "Oh, God, heal my body," and yet they dissipate their bodies. They don't exercise. They don't diet. They don't eat right. And, they say, "God, please make me well." You know what they're really asking? They're looking for a license to dissipate. I mean, they think, on the one hand, that they can just simply dissipate their body, and on the other hand come to God and get a quick fix.

Now, if you have abused your body—and, I'm not saying that everybody who is sick

has abused their body—but some people are sick because they’ve abused their body. And, if you come to God and you say, “Now, God forgive me,” God will forgive you, but that doesn’t mean that your health is going to be restored. That doesn’t mean that the law of sowing and reaping has been broken. That’s the reason Paul said so clearly, in Galatians 6 verse 7, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”* You say, “God is holding a grudge.” No, God is not holding a grudge. God had mercy upon these people. God pardoned their sin, but He took vengeance upon their iniquities. It is built into life.

I told the businessmen that this lot of people sow their wild oats six days a week and then come to church on Sunday and pray for crop failure. They have the idea that somehow when they come and they get forgiven that the consequences of sin are taken away. They’re not taken away. I’m talking about the consequences of sin in this life. Of course, we’re not going to go to Hell. God is not punishing us. If God were punishing us in that sense, we would go to Hell. God is chastising us.

Now, if indeed God is chastising you, that ought to be a cause for thankfulness and not for complaint. I want you to turn with me to Hebrews chapter 12 for a moment. And, let’s look here at this very wonderful passage of Scripture, beginning in verse 5: *“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”* (Hebrews 12:5–7).

That is one way that you can know that you’re saved—is that God won’t let you get away with sin. If you’re one of these people that are living high, wide, and handsome, living in sin, and God doesn’t lay the rod on, don’t think you’re getting away with it. You’re not getting away with it. You’ve never been saved. If you were saved, God would have chastened you. If you were God’s son, He would have chastised you. And, verse 8 makes it very clear: *“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons”* (Hebrews 12:8).

What God is saying is, “I never sired you, I never fathered you, and you’re not my child. If you were my child, I would have chastised you.” One of the ways that David could know that he was saved was not that David was unable to commit sin. He was able to commit sin, but the way that David knew that he was saved is that he wasn’t able to sin and get away with it. And, *the most miserable man on earth is not a lost man. The most miserable man on earth is a saved man out of fellowship with God.* Listen. You can’t sin as a child of God and get away with it.

“For whom the Father loves He chastens.” *“What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”* Now, listen: *“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are*

partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence...—and, by the way, if you do not correct your children, your children will not respect you—“we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:6–10). That’s what I’m trying to say. God’s chastisement is not punitive punishment where God is trying to even the score. That’s not it at all. God wants to make us holy. God wants to make us like Him.

Now, notice verse 11, and this is the verse I’ve been working toward: “*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed*” (Hebrews 12:11–13). What is God saying? If God forgives you, and then God chastises you, He does it because He wants to teach you a lesson. He wants to impress something upon your heart. He is not trying to get even with you, but He is indeed trying to make you holy. And so, even though it doesn’t seem to be joyous, you need simply just to thank Him, to bless Him, and to praise Him. God loves you too much to hold back the strap. God loves you too much to let you go without chastisement.

Now, I know we’ve been talking about this with Dr. Ross Campbell here about how to really love a teenager and how to really love a child. And, Dr. Campbell taught, as I believe, that the rod, the spanking, that physical chastisement, ought to be the last and not the first thing that we do. We ought to warn, we ought to teach, we ought to instruct, we ought to encourage, and it ought to be the last resort. Like the lady who said that she married her husband, she met him in a travel agency: he was the last resort. And, that’s what our chastisement ought to be. And, God first warns, and God encourages, and God rebukes, but then God chastens. And, God loves us sometimes too much to let us go into deep sin and then live with immunity. God pardons our sins and takes vengeance on our inventions.

I’m going to tell you a story, and then I’ll be finished with the message. It is a story that I heard an evangelist tell, one of the great old-time Southern Baptist evangelists. He said when he was a boy he was raised in a preacher’s home also; his dad was a preacher of the gospel. And, he said, “There were a lot of things Dad would let us get away with, but there was one thing that Dad would never let us get away with,”—and, by the way, I’ve never let my children get away with this—“and that is to sass their mother—to sass their mother.” I tell you, you’re in for certain trouble in our home. I guess still. even though my kids are all grown. I believe I could still whip any of them. And, I want to tell you one thing they will not do and do with impunity is to sass their

mama. And, that was just kind of a law around Elmer's home, this evangelist named Elmer, and you just didn't sass Mama.

He said one day he remembered that as he was a young strapping boy that his mother told him something, and he turned around to his mama, and he shot out the lip to her. And, he said something cruel and disrespectful to his mother. He said he had a feeling of terror when he was doing it. He knew he ought not to be doing it. And, he turned around, and of all things, there was his dad. Oh, the judgment day had arrived. But, he said his dad reacted in a strange way. He said his dad said to him, "Elmer, Elmer, I can't believe what I've heard, son. Go into your bedroom now. He said he obediently went into the bedroom. And then, he said his daddy came into the bedroom and sat down on the bed and started to weep, and said, "Son, I'm wounded. I'm crushed that my son—my son—would speak that way to his mother." Then, he said, "Son, your mother and I gave you to God before you were born. Son, your mother went down into to the valley of shadow of death to bring you into this world," and then he began to recount how many times his mother had done without things that he might have things, and how she had gone through poverty that he might have clothes to wear, and how she had nursed him and sat up with him and wept over him and prayed with him and cooked for him and sewed for him and loved him. He said he got to feeling so low and so sinful and so wicked at what he had done to his mother that he began to cry and his dad began to cry.

"Oh," he said, "Daddy, I was terrible. I ought not to have talked to Mama that way." He replied, "You're right." So, he said, "Not only did you break her heart; you broke my heart. Not only did you break her heart and my heart; you broke God's heart, and you're a child of God." He said, "Daddy, I sure did; I sinned against God." He said, "Well, son, are you sorry?" He said, "Daddy, I am so sorry." He said, "Then, let's get down here by the bed and ask God to forgive you." And, they got down by the bed, and Elmer's daddy said, "Oh, God, oh, God, my son—my son—spoke to his mother that way. God, I'm so ashamed of him, but God, he says he's sorry. And, God, he wants to be forgiven. And, Lord, here's Elmer; he's going to talk to you." "Oh, God, I am sorry. Oh, God, forgive me, God, that I spoke that way to my mama. God, I shouldn't have done that. I'm so sorry."

Now, he said, "Son, you go get off your knees, and dry your eyes, and go down and tell your mama how sorry you are." He said, "I dried my eyes, and knowing it was all right with God now, and all right with my dad, and I'd been forgiven, I went down and slipped my arm around my mother's waist, and I said to her, 'Mama, I am so sorry that I ever talked to you that way, my precious mama. Please, Mama, will you forgive me?'" She said, "Elmer, yes, I forgive you, son," and gave him a mother's kiss, and he felt so forgiven. Then, he said he saw his dad standing there with a belt in his hand. And, he

said, “Now, Elmer, come in here.” “And,” he said, “he brought me in that room and wore me out and gave me the worst licking I’d ever had, after all that forgiveness and all that praying. And, he said, ‘Son, you’ve been forgiven, but I just want you to remember, all right, that we don’t do that.’” And, he said, “I have remembered forevermore.”

Conclusion

Oh, my friend, there are times when God will forgive you, and you will be as forgiven as you will ever be forgiven. Look at our text again. Turn with me again, if you will, to the Book of Psalms so we’ll not forget it—Psalm 99—read it, and have prayer—and verse 8: *“Thou answeredst them, O LORD our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy”* (Psalm 99:8–9).

Now, my friend, if you’ve sinned against God, come to Him and ask Him to forgive you. And, when His sweet presence fills your heart, you are forgiven as you’ve ever been and ever will be, but still there may be the consequences of your sin. So, never ever think that just because God forgives us, it really doesn’t make much difference whether we sin or whether we don’t. There is no sin without suffering. Suffering follows wrong like echoes follows song, on and on and on.

The Big Lie

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: February 11, 1990

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 100

“Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

PSALMS 100:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. I Reject Evolution for Logical Reasons
 - A. The Origin of Life
 - B. The Fixity of the Species
 - C. The Second Law of Thermodynamics
 - D. The Nonphysical Properties Found in Creation
- II. I Reject Evolution for Moral Reasons
- III. I Reject Evolution for Theological Reasons

Conclusion

Introduction

Tonight's the first in a series of messages entitled "These Issues We Must Face" and what I'm going to call "The Big Lie." And, it deals with evolution: Is evolution fact or fiction? Are you the creation of God or a monkey's uncle? Now, you need to ask yourself that question. Now, you may say, "Well, I do believe I descended from an ape or ape-like creature." That's your business. You ought to know your kinfolks better than I do. My dear friend, this is a foundational question. The question, purely and simply put, is this: Did God make man, or did man imagine God? Is man in the image of God, or is God in the imagination of man? That is the basic fundamental question. Is man just a clever animal? Did man just evolve out of some primordial ooze? Is he an accident, or is he the creation of God?

Read with me Psalm 100: *“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations”* (Psalm 100:1–5).

Time Magazine recently carried an ad for the Time-Life book series entitled *The Emergence of Man*. And, this series can be found on the shelves of most public libraries and can be found in the libraries of most elementary schools, junior high schools, and high school libraries across America. Let me share that ad. Let me tell you what is being taught and what is being swallowed hook, line, and sinker. Here's the ad in *Time Magazine*: "Today that creature who first began to raise himself above the other animals no longer exists. He has become unique, set apart from the two million other species living on the planet by a thumb that makes your hand a precision tool, by a knee that locks you into a comfortable upright position, and by your capacity abstract thought and speech"—friend, that's all the difference between you and the other animals—"All of this and more has enabled your species to dominate the earth, and yet you share with every other creature that ever lived the same origin. The same accident that led to the spontaneous generation of the first single-cell slimy algae three-and-one-half billion years ago." So, you share with every other animal, every other creature, the same accident that caused them to come into being. You, like they, came from slimy algae.

Now, just suppose that you accept that three-and-a-half billion years ago the kinds of people that are sitting in this congregation tonight were an accident that happened in slime. You just think about that; get the ramifications about that. What does that say about the true value of human life compared to any other creature? What possible basis of morality could there be? Could there possibly be a fixed standard of right or wrong if you are an accident and the product of slimy algae? What could be the possible purpose and meaning of life—real meaning—if this is true? Well, let me continue the ad. They go on to say, "How did it all happen? What was the evolutionary process that led to man and his conquest of a harsh and hostile environment? You find the amazing story in Time-Life Books' new series, *The Emergence of Man*." Your introductory volume, *The Missing Link*, shows the stranger than science fiction world of ape-man. I can say, "Amen" to that? It is stranger than science fiction. Then, it goes on to say, "You will feel a sense of immediacy in visual adventure, in incredible lifelike, pictorial, technical photo painting." Do you get it now? They are photo painting, then. There are all the pictures, and the kids say, "Wow, it must be true. Look, they've even got pictures!"

Just what is evolution anyway? Well, the teaching, I suppose, first popularized by Charles Darwin in his famous volume *The Origin of The Species*. It says this on page 523: "analogy would lead me to the belief that all animals and plants are descended from some one prototype. All organisms start from a common origin, from such low and intermediate forms that both animals and plants may have been developed. All of the organic things which have ever lived on the earth may be descended from someone primordial form." Now, here's what they believe, folks. And, they call us "people who live

by faith.” I’ve always said that *it takes more faith to believe the monkey story than it does the Word of God*. They... It all started out with some green slime, some scum, that produced some primitive protozoa, first life, and then somehow that began to get more complex. And, that primitive protozoa turned to an un-segmented worm. Then, that un-segmented worm, through millions and millions of years, became a fish. And, that fish, through greater complexity, became an amphibian. And, that amphibian crawled out on dry land and became a reptile. And, after a while, that reptile got wings and feathers and became birds and mammals. And, after a while, billions of years, ipso facto, now man!

From molecule to man, from the goo to the zoo to you! And, that’s what they believe. And then, you say, “It all happened that somewhere, somehow, out there, there was an inorganic ocean of certain chemicals, nitrogen, ammonia, salt, methane, and carbon dioxide, just bubbling away.” By the way, they never tell you where that came from—where this inorganic ocean ever came from—because they don’t know. And then, somehow, out of all of this, there arose some amino acids that got together, and then they formed peptides and polypeptides. And then, protein molecules became greater complexities. It became living matter and finally conscious matter, self-conscious matter, and then man. Do you know what all that really is? It is a fairy tale for adults. And, they believe not the kiss of a princess, but millions of years, would turn frogs into princesses—time plus chance.

I want to say that I totally reject evolution—totally. I reject it for three reasons.

I. I Reject Evolution for Logical Reasons

First of all, without the Word of God—though I totally believe the Word of God—I reject evolution for logical reasons. I mean, it just does not make sense. “Well,” you say, “but you’re not a scholar, and certainly not a paleontologist. You’re certainly not a biologist. You may be trained in theology, but what do you know, Adrian Rogers, about biology, paleontology, and geology?” Well, friend, I can read. I tell you something else: I have found a number of great scholars who are not ministers, who are not even Christians, who don’t even believe in God, who absolutely reject evolution on intellectual grounds. Let me give you some of them.

Dr. Newton Tasmanian, a physiologist for the Atomic Energy Commission, stated this—and I quote: “Scientists who go about teaching that evolution is a fact of life are great con men”—now, notice this is a scientist saying this—“and the story they are telling may be the greatest hoax ever. In explaining evolution, we do not have one iota of fact.” That’s not a Baptist preacher; that’s a physiologist for the Atomic Energy Commission.

Dr. Etheridge of the British Museum states this—and I quote: “Nine-tenths of the talks of evolution is sheer nonsense, not founded on observation, and wholly

unsupported by fact. This museum is full of proofs of the utter falsity of their view.” That’s not a backwoods Baptist preacher talking there.

Dr. Ambrose Fleming, president of the Philosophical Society of Great Britain, exclaimed this—and I quote, “The evolution theory is purely the product of imagination.”

Dr. Cecil Wakeley, the leading British surgeon, late president of the Royal College of Surgeons, said this: “When I was a medical student, I was taught the theory of evolution, but I never believed it.”

I want to give you four bridges over which the evolutionists cannot cross—four intellectual bridges that he must cross if evolution is true, but he cannot cross these four bridges. I’m talking, now, about the rational, logical reasons why we don’t believe in evolution.

A. **The Origin of Life**

Number one: The bridge that no evolutionist can cross is the origin of life. He cannot explain life. Now, they try to explain it. Did you know that a MIT professor said, “Well, I’ll tell you how we have life on Planet Earth: a meteorite brought life from another planet. Or, perhaps”—can you imagine how hot a meteorite gets? But, all right. He says—“perhaps in another time we had extraterrestrial visitors”—E.T. came, or someone like him, and he actually says this—“And, he left some space garbage on earth, and in that garbage was life”? Some of the life, I—see, I might believe that. But, all this does, dear friend, is just to move the question backward. You have to ask yourself, “How did life begin on that planet?” That doesn’t address the question at all. Then, the other answer is, “Well, life came about by what they call an ‘accident.’” As *Time-Life Magazine* says, “The accidental origin of life happened by”—what they call; listen to it—“spontaneous generation”—that is, to put it elegantly, a fortuitous concourse of atoms, or to put it as *Time-Life* series put it, “an accident.” A flash of lightning or something through the vapors of green scum caused life.

That is so absurd. Let me tell you what Dr. George Wall, professor of American Biology of Harvard—no less than Harvard—said... And, by the way, just not an ordinary professor; he won the Nobel Prize in biology in 1971, so this is no sixth or seventh guy. He’s writing in the learned journal *Scientific America*. And, this is what he says about the origin of life. Listen to it; now, I’m going to quote: “There are only two possibilities as to how life arose: one is spontaneous generation arising to evolution; the other is a supernatural created act, a creative act, of God. There is no third possibility.” Either it’s spontaneous generation, or God did it. He said, “No third possibility.”

Now, he says, “Spontaneous generation—that life arose from nonliving matter—was scientifically disproved 120 years ago by Lewis Pasteur and others. That leaves us with only one possible conclusion—that life arose as a supernatural creative act of God.” Now, you think he’s doing pretty good, don’t you? But, just keep on listening. He says, “I

will not accept that philosophically.” He said, “I don’t accept it philosophically—that God did it.” He said, “I do not accept that philosophically, because I do not want to believe in God. Therefore, I choose to believe in that which I know is scientifically impossible—spontaneous generation arising to evolution.” Did you hear that confession? He says, “I know it’s impossible, but I believe it because I choose not to believe in God.” Thank God for an honest, brilliant, stupid man.

You see, 120 years+ ago, Lewis Pasteur did prove beyond a shadow of any doubt that there’s no such thing as spontaneous generation. For 2,000 years, men believed that. But, why did they believe in spontaneous generation—that out of nonliving matter life could come? Well, these primitive people would see something like rotten, decaying meat on the ground, and if it would lie there in the sun long enough, after a while, what would happen? It would be moving with life—maggots. Or, they would take rags and cheese in a corner of a room and leave it in the corner of a room for a while. And, after a while, what? Mice. Or, they would have water uncovered in a pond. And, after a while, what? Wiggle-tailed mosquito larvae would be in that scummy water. And, to their naked eye, they said, “All of that inorganic matter has just simply produced life.” But, Lewis Pasteur and others, in controlled experiments, said, “That might not be so.” And then, he experimented in closely controlled and regulated experiments, and it becomes axiomatic in biology.

Listen, any biology textbook will say this—that a basic axiom of biology is that life only arises from life. If you’ve taken biology... And, I took biology and made good grades in biology, and it was one of my best subjects. My dear friend, life only arises from life. Scientifically it is impossible to get life from nonliving matter. This is called the “law of biogenesis”—that life only comes from life. This one point alone destroys evolution. The evolutionist cannot possibly answer how life began scientifically. It is impossible apart from the Giver of life, the One, the Lord Jesus, who said, “*I am...the life*” (John 14:6).

B. The Fixity of the Species

Now, let me tell you another bridge that he cannot cross—not only the origin of life, but also the fixity of the species. “What do you mean by that, Adrian?” I mean that God built something—God locked something into creation—when He made it, and that is that organisms would bring forth after their kind. In Genesis chapter 1, verse 11–12: “*And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit*”—now, listen to this next phrase—“*after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good*” (Genesis 1:11–12). If you read there in Genesis, ten times that little phrase occurs, “after his kind”—“after his kind.” What does that mean? What

does that mean? It means that things reproduce after their own kind: horses produce horses; cats produce cats; men produce men, and mice produce mice—“after his kind.”

Now, we all know in biology, there is mutation, but not transmutation. And, you say, “What is the difference?” Well, for example, there may be a variety of roses. You can get mutant roses, but they’re still roses. There are a variety of dogs, but they’re still dogs. The scientists, because the fruit fly multiplies so fast, they bombard the fruit flies with their ray guns to try to mess up the genes in the fruit flies. They do this to see if they can make mutant fruit flies; and so, they bombard these fruit flies, and they reproduce. They bombard them, and they reproduce. And, they bombard them, and they get some strange looking fruit flies—I mean, weird fruit flies. But friend, they’re still fruit flies. They never become bumblebees. There is mutation, but not transmutation. You can mate a donkey and a horse and get a mule, but you cannot get a new animal. A mule itself does not reproduce.

I heard about a man who thought, one day, that he would get together a shellfish called the “abalone,” and get a crocodile, and blend them together, and see what he got. He already had a name—abadile. But, he got a crock-a-baloney.

Now, my dear friend, you cannot fool nature. If evolution is true—if evolution is true—then one species has to evolve into another species. And, if that were true, then you would expect to find here, or somewhere, transitional forms. You would expect to find the missing link. You would expect to find in the fossil records transitional forms from this species to that species. Now, if you don’t hear anything else, let me tell you tonight, it is an outstanding and astounding fact that of the uncounted billions and trillions of fossils not one transitional form can be found—not one.

Now friend, they talk about the missing link. May I tell you the whole chain is missing? Not one may be found. Stuck hair on his head and there is Nebraska man. They still have him in the museum, but you know what they discovered? The tooth was a tooth of a pig. And, they built a whole race of men out of Nebraska man. When I was in school, we studied the Java ape-man. In 1891, Dr. Eugene Dubois found in Java the top of a skull. He found a fragment of a left thighbone. He found three molar teeth, and he announced that he had found the missing link—750,000 years old. Now, these bones weren’t found together; they were scattered over a wide area, and they were found over a space of about a year. But, he brought these fragments together and said, “There he is—750,000 years old. He’s a missing link.” They brought 24 scientists from Europe to examine the Java ape-man, and there was no agreement. Ten said that they were the bones of an ape. Seven said they were the bones of a man, and seven said it was a missing link. Dr. Dubois later on had to confess that they were the remains of an ape, but they had already named it Pithecanthropus, “the ape-man that stands up.” Ape—pure and simple, he was not a man.

Then, there's the famous Piltdown man. Charles Dawson, in Piltdown, England, who found in a gravel pit a piece of a jaw—he found two molar teeth and a piece of a skull. And, out of that jaw, these teeth, and a piece of a skull, he made the famous Piltdown man. Everybody said, "There he is! How wonderful that is—one of the greatest finds in paleontology!" Later on the whole thing was shown to be a hoax. The *Reader's Digest* wrote an article about it, and I have other articles in my files. In 1956, the *Reader's Digest* said, "The great Piltdown hoax was an ape only 50 years old. Its teeth had been filed down and artificially colored. By this time, however, he had already made his way into the museum and into the textbooks." What had happened is that there was a rival archeologist and scientist who wanted to make a fool of one of his peers; and so, he planted those things with the aid of some students—these filed-down artificially colored teeth in a gravel pit. And, when they found it, they announced to the world, "Look at what we have." Now, for 50 years people believed in the Piltdown man. He was shown to be a hoax.

"Well," you say, "he can't help it if somebody fooled him." My dear friend, I just want to show you how anxious men are to make a monkey out of themselves—how easily they believe this, how eager they are. "Well," you say, "Pastor, what about all of those dinosaurs and cavemen?" We have cavemen who live today. We have aborigines and those who live in primitive conditions today. Listen, you can go walking down the streets of Memphis, Tennessee, and you'll find someone who looks just about like one of those depictions of cavemen today—I mean, today, you'll find them. As a matter of fact, I see a few out there tonight. By the way, did you know that one out of three is incredibly beautiful or handsome? Look on either side of you: if it's not them, it must be you. Isn't that wonderful?

My dear friend, listen—what about the dinosaurs? Sure, there are dinosaurs. Recently, I was in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. I went into that Museum of Natural History. I had to tear myself away from looking at all of the different dinosaurs. Many of these, my dear friends, are not imagination and Plaster of Paris. These are real bones, from real creatures, that lived here on the earth. But, they don't say a word about evolution. How did the dinosaurs come to be? My dear friend, the dinosaurs came about as a direct creation of Almighty God, and they were created the sixth day—the same day that man was created.

Turn to the Book of Job with me for a moment. Now, look in Job chapter 40, verses 15–24, and I want you to see how the Bible describes what I believe is the dinosaur: "*Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee*"—that is, "Job, I made this critter the same day I made you, on the sixth day"—"*Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar*"—some people try to say, "Well, this is

a description of a behemoth; it is a description of an elephant.” Have you ever seen an elephant’s tail? Does it remind you of a cedar?—“*He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his stones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron*”—that’s why we still have dinosaur bones today. And, the word *dinosaur* just simply means “terrible lizard”—“*He is the chief of the ways of God*”—that is, “the biggest thing”—“*he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him*”—that is, “God can handle him all right”—“*Surely the mountains bring him forth food, where all the beasts of the field play. He lieth under the shady trees, in the covert of the reed, and fens. The shady trees cover him with their shadow; the willows of the brook compass him about*”—that is, “He’s in and out of the water”—“*Behold, he drinketh up a river, and hasteth not*”—that is, “Nobody chases him around”—“*he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth*”—he’s a thirsty critter. Now, watch it—“*He taketh it with his eyes: his nose pierceth through snares*” (Job 40:15–24).

Do you think He’s talking about an elephant? Have you ever seen an elephant’s nose? They’re not going to pierce through anything. My dear friend, here is a creature that was made the same day that man was made. The dinosaurs are extinct. We’re worrying about other things becoming extinct. The saber tooth tiger and the mastodon have become extinct. We were worrying about the bald eagle becoming extinct. But, you see, my dear friend, dinosaurs are a fact, but dinosaurs and men co-existed together.

The evolutionist doesn’t know what to do with this. If you go to Glen Rose, Texas, outside of Glen Rose, Texas, is the Paluxy River. And, in the river bed of the Paluxy River, near Glen Rose, Texas—and you can go there tomorrow, if you just get an airplane or drive there—you can see dinosaurs’ tracks in the sediment of the river that have hardened into stone. And, in the middle of those dinosaur tracks are human tracks in the stone, which is proof-positive that men and dinosaurs existed together. Now, why don’t evolutionists like this? Well, evolutionary thought tells you that dinosaurs became extinct 120 to 65 million years ago. But, they tell you that man only came on the scene one million to four million years ago. It just messes up the whole thing when you have dinosaurs and men together.

Now, let me just sum up this thing, dear friend. What I’m talking about now is the fixity of the species. A well-known biologist of the Smithsonian Institute that I just referred to said this: “there is no evidence which would show man developing step by step from lower forms of life”—did you hear that? No evidence—“there is nothing to show that man was in any way connected with monkeys. He appeared suddenly and in substantially in the same form as he is today. There are no such things as missing links. So, as far as I’m concerned, the major groups of animals... The creationist appears to have that best argument. There is not the slightest evidence that any one of the major

groups arose from any other.” That is not a Baptist preacher talking. That is a scientist telling you, dear friend, don’t buy into the Plaster of Paris and the imagination of these who would try to tell you differently.

C. **The Second Law of Thermodynamics**

The third bridge—first is the origin of life; second, the fixity of the species—the third bridge over which the evolution cannot cross is this—the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Now, what is the Second Law of Thermodynamics? It simply means this, in physics—that energy is never destroyed, but it continually becomes less available for further work. Or, to put another way, everything in the physical, material world tends to wear out, run down, and to disintegrate and ultimately to change into chaos. All processes, by definition, involve change. But, this change is ever downward and never upward in complexity, as the evolutionists assume.

Now, why would God ever make that true in the world? I mean, why is everything wearing out? Why is the Second Law of Thermodynamics here? And, it is here. I mean, if you leave your garden alone, what’s gonna happen? What’s gonna happen to it? It’ll just turn into a garden of weeds. What is happening to your body? Is your body getting stronger or weaker day by day? Well, it may temporarily get stronger if you exercise a little bit. But, you know that you’re just winding down to the grave. Isn’t that true? I mean, if you get a brand new Mercedes Benz and just drive it out in the woods, park it out there, and leave it for about 20 years, what’s gonna happen to it? It’s gonna disintegrate. Or, if you want to see the Law of Thermodynamics work—the Second Law—go into any boy’s bedroom.

What I’m trying to tell you, dear friend, is that everything is moving from order to chaos. In the entire world, everything is winding down, not building up into more and more complexity. It is disintegrating into decay and death. Why is this? Because the judgment of God is upon His creation. Romans chapter 8 and verse 22: *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”* (Romans 8:22). Now, the evolutionist cannot answer the Second Law of Thermodynamics. He just can’t answer it. He has no answer for it. How he can get things building into more and more complexity when everything is wearing out and winding down? Now, what he will say is this: “Well, that is true of our observable time, but if you just give it more time, then maybe it’ll be different.”

Now, suppose you and I fly over Memphis, Tennessee, with all of the parts of an automobile in an airplane—and at 5,000 feet—and we dump them out and expect them to be a well-fitted together automobile by the time they hit the ground. “Well,” you say, “no, that’s not gonna happen, because it’s just...the pieces are going to scatter everywhere.” But, evolutionists would say, “Well, now, what we need to do is have more time. So, this time...rather than 5,000 feet, we’ll get 30,000 feet, and dump them out.

They'll fall longer and further." They're just going to spread further. Now, my dear friend, what I'm trying to say is this—that there is no way possible that the evolutionist can span the bridge of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

D. The Nonphysical Properties Found in Creation

Now, there is a fourth bridge that the evolutionist cannot cross; it is this—the nonphysical properties that are found in creation. This choir just sang. No evolutionist can explain music. How did music evolve? Now, music is a real thing. Where did the notes come from? Where did the sound come from? Where does the love of music, art, beauty, and the hunger for God come from? Can you account for these things under the law of the survival of the fittest? Impossible. They don't fit into the law of the survival of the fittest. I'm just telling you, number one—and the next two points will be much briefer, and you can relax—but I reject evolution for logical reasons.

II. I Reject Evolution for Moral Reasons

Secondly, I reject evolution for moral reasons. There were two atheists who lived in the time of Darwin who bought into Darwin's philosophy; one was named Nietzsche, and the other was named Karl Marx. Marx was the founder of Communism; his apostle was Adolph Hitler. Karl Marx, the founder of Communism, was unspeakably immoral. My dear friend, may I tell you that it is only a step from the teaching of evolution to the atrocities of Communism and the gas ovens of Nazism?

You see, if man is an animal, he is expendable like another animal. And, if he is an animal, then, indeed, the law of the survival of the fittest is true. And, that is exactly, precisely, what Hitler said. He said that his race was a superior race, the Aryans; and, therefore, they had the right to exterminate the Jew. An animal lives for—what?—self-gratification, self-preservation, self-propagation. That's where we have a generation today who are bought into the philosophy that "if it feels good, do it." There are people you've taught... We've taught our kids they've come from animals; and now, they've finally begun to act, live, like animals. Friend, *man didn't spring from the beast; he's headed for the beast, the antichrist*. And, I'm going to be talking about that in this series of messages.

I spoke in Israel with a humanist, Bob Unity. He worked in the Rockefeller Museum there—an educated, erudite, young Israeli. He came over to lecture us about the archeology around the walls of ancient Jerusalem. Late at night in the hotel room, we sat up and talked. We began to witness to this curator of the Rockefeller museum. Finally, it came out that he did not believe in God. He said, "I am a humanist, and I reject the idea of God." I asked him—I said, "Then, if you reject the idea of God, what makes man different from an animal?" He said, "Man is no different than from an animal, except that he is more complex, and more intelligent, and more sensitive." I

said, “Therefore, if you were to have a retarded or deficient baby, but had a healthy dog, and you had to spare one or the other, which would you spare?” He said, “If it were my dog, I’d spare my dog. The dog is of more value than the child.” Logically, he was right—if there is no God, I mean—that a healthy dog is more valuable than a weak and a deformed baby.

Now, you see, dear friend, when you follow the evolution all the way out, and you just think about it, you can understand why in the schools today they’re teaching our kids that they came from animals. And, therefore, there are no fixed values, and, therefore, we have courses in values clarification. Remember, boys and girls, there is right and wrong. You see, today, the educators—boy are they in a problem, because they say, “We need to get values back into education; everything is coming apart.” And then, somebody says, “Whose values?” Then they don’t know what to do. Separation of Church and State—get the Ten Commandments out. Well, whose values? I’ll tell you whose values: it the humanist values that are brought right in. Therefore, you have the teaching of evolution. Therefore, you have sexual education. Therefore, you have euthanasia. Therefore, you have abortion. And, therefore, you have homosexuality as an acceptable alternate lifestyle. Who’s to say that homosexuality is wrong? And, man evolved and is evolving. No one. Dear friend, if there is a God in the Glory—and there is—then there is a fixed law of right and wrong.

III. I Reject Evolution for Theological Reasons

And, I’ll give you the last reason that I reject evolution: not only for logical reasons, and not only for moral reasons, but I reject it with all of the unction, function, and emotion of my soul for theological reasons. The Word of God—the Word of God—doesn’t teach it. Now, there are some of you who try to have it both ways. You say, “I believe the Bible, and I believe in evolution. And, I just believe that evolution is the way that God did it.” Well, my dear friend, you’re doing mental gymnastics. You cannot have it both ways and be consistent—not with the Word of God.

H.G. Wells, the famous historian—not an evangelical Christian, but he was the author of the outline of history—wrote this, and I quote—and he’s quite right; he said, “If all animals and man evolved, then there were no first parents, no Paradise, no Fall. And, if there had been no Fall, then the entire fabric—the entire historic fabric—of Christianity, the story of the first sin, and the reason for the atonement—collapses like a house of cards.” That is, if man is evolving and moving ever onward and upward, that if man was not created perfect, if he did not fall from the Garden of Eden, then there’s no need for the atonement. Forget Christianity. You see, the Bible teaches that man was created as a creative act of God. He was created perfect, and then he fell. Evolution says that man is just coming up from green scum. Both are diametrically opposite.

The Bible calls it sin; the evolutionists calls it an upward movement. And, the great question is this: Does man need a boost from beneath, or a birth from above? That's a great question. And, it just roots back—did God create man, or did man imagine God? My dear friend, *“it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture”* (Psalm 100:3). Darwin wrote his book called *The Origin of the Species*. Friend, I've got a book that tells of the destiny of the species; I've got a book that tells me where I've come from, why I'm here, and where I'm going. There was a time when you were not, but there'll never be a time when you will not be. Your soul will be in existence somewhere when the sun, moon, and the stars have grown cold.

Conclusion

Eternity, my dear friend, is not way away; it's only a heartbeat away. And, where you'll spend eternity depends on what you do with the Lord Jesus. When He made the first world and when He created us, He did it with a word. But, when He saved us, it took every drop of His blood. *“If any man be in Christ, he is a new [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Dealing with Loneliness

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 5, 1986

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 102:6–7

“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.”

PSALMS 102:7

Outline

Introduction

- I. Loneliness Is a Common Fact
 - A. Loneliness Is Caused by Rejection
 - B. Loneliness Is Caused by Insecurity
 - C. Loneliness Is Caused by Sorrow
 - D. Loneliness Is Caused by Selfishness
 - E. Loneliness Can be Built In
- II. Loneliness Is a Crippling Force
- III. Loneliness May be a Defeated Foe
 - A. Jesus Knows How You Feel
 - B. Jesus Meets Your Needs
 - C. Jesus Understands You
 - D. Jesus Needs You
 - E. Jesus Is Always There

Conclusion

Introduction

Psalm 102, verses 6 and 7—as I read these verses, I want you to pretend that you’re a counselor, a psychologist. I want you to tell me what the problem is and what the person is feeling who wrote these words: *“I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top”* (Psalm 102:6–7). What’s his problem? The problem is loneliness: *“like a pelican [in] the wilderness...an owl [in] the desert...and...a sparrow alone [on] the [rooftop]”* (Psalm 102:6–7). Can you imagine how insignificant a sparrow would feel if a sparrow could think and didn’t know what we know—that God feeds the sparrow as not a sparrow falls but what He knows about it (Matthew 10:29). So small, so unnoticed—an owl alone in the desert, but who gives a hoot? A sparrow on the rooftop—but who knows? Who cares? An insignificant little bird—nobody even can see him all alone.

I want to talk to you today about “Dealing with Loneliness.” We’re in a series of

handling our emotions before our emotions handle us.

I. Loneliness Is a Common Fact

And, I want to say, first of all—listen to me—that loneliness is a common fact. Paul Tournier, the noted Swiss psychiatrist, said this—that “loneliness is the most devastating malady of this age.” Now, that’s a pretty firm statement—“the most devastating malady of this age.” And, the great playwright, Thomas Wolfe, said, “Don’t think of loneliness as some curious abstraction. Don’t think of loneliness as some rare phenomenon.” Thomas Wolfe said that “loneliness”—listen to it—“is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.” That is, we all have it, and it’s coming; and we can’t stop it. It’s “central and inevitable.”

And, don’t think it’s just the little widow alone in her cottage or in her apartment that is lonely. The rich and the famous are lonely. I was reading of a former United States President, and he talked about the loneliness of the presidency. Janis Joplin—she’s a rock star back in the 70s. Janis Joplin had the world at her feet, so far as entertainment is concerned. But, Janis Joplin, in a Los Angeles apartment, went in there and, with a needle, injected heroin into her arm until she had taken such a dose of heroin that it took her life. They found her there with those tracks there upon her arm. Just before she had done that, she said to her friend, “After I come off the stage,” she said, “all I do is sit around and watch television, and I am so very lonely—so very lonely.” H.G. Wells was a man with a fantastic mind. He was perhaps one of the greatest intellects of this century—the noted historian. When he was 65, he said this: “I am very lonely—lonely.” You see it is, as Thomas Wolfe said, “the central and inevitable malady of this age.”

What is loneliness anyway? Let me tell you what it is not. Loneliness is not isolation; loneliness is not solitude. Solitude is good. We need some solitude. We need to get alone. You can be alone without being lonely. And, if you’re one of these people who can’t be alone, you’ve got a problem. Jesus would often withdraw Himself to the wilderness and get alone. Do you know the people who don’t like to be alone? Those people who don’t like to look God in the face and they don’t like to look themselves in the face. That’s the reason why everybody’s got a little Walkman, you know; they’ve got a ghetto blaster up here: they don’t want to get alone; they don’t want to have to think, and they don’t want to have to face God. But, Jesus withdrew Himself to pray, to be alone.

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.*

—C. AUSTIN MILES

Loneliness is not solitude. You can be alone without being lonely.

Say something else about loneliness, dear friend: there's a difference between being lonely and being lonesome. You can be lonesome without being lonely. When you're lonesome, you're just away from home and friends and you just want to get back. When I was preparing this sermon, or writing these particular words before I said them, I was sitting Friday in an airport in Louisville in a restaurant. There was a guy over there with a mug of beer. There was a salesman. Over here was a woman behind the counter. And, up there the television is blaring some game show. And, I'm sitting out there. I was by myself, and I was lonesome; but I wasn't lonely. And, I knew in just a little while I was going to get on an airplane, and there would be sweet Joyce to meet me in the corridor—she was, as she ought to have done. She came and gave me a big kiss when I got off that airplane, and I looked forward to that. Sure, I—you—can get lonesome when you're away. There's the lonesomeness—those who travel. A traveling salesman, truck drivers, and so forth on the highway—they were separated from loved ones temporarily, but that is not the state of loneliness; that's just being lonesome, and there is a difference.

Now, let me tell you something else, dear friend—that you can be lonely in a crowd. As a matter of fact, the bigger the crowd, so many times, the more lonely we are. And, I dare say, with several thousand here this morning, right in the midst of this crowd there are some very lonely people. Did you know that? Do you know what Thoreau said? Thoreau said that “a city is a place where hundreds of people are lonely together.” As a matter of fact, sometimes the crowds only enhance the loneliness. People who are lonely look at other people who seem to be so happy. They look at people who seem to have friends, fellowship, and families. And they're alone. They sit in a restaurant and look across the restaurant at those other people. They walk the streets, and they look at those other people. They pass those homes and think about the people in those other homes. That's the reason why, in the big cities, you have the “Lonely Hearts Club.” That's the reason the single bars and these other things thrive as they do. It is but a way of saying that people are lonely, and they're looking for someone to recognize them. They feel like a pelican in the wilderness; they feel like an owl in the desert and like a sparrow on a rooftop.

What is loneliness? Loneliness is not isolation. It is insulation; it is the feeling cut off. It is feeling unnoticed, unloved, uncared for, unneeded, and maybe even unnecessary. That's loneliness. And, remember Tournier said it is the chief malady of this age.

Let me tell you, everyone has three basic psychological and spiritual needs. You want me to tell you what they are? Number one: Everybody needs someone to love and to share intimately with. Number two: As a result of that, they need someone who can understand—to know how they feel—somebody who says, “Yes, I understand; I care.”

Number three: Everybody needs to be needed and wanted. Now, if you don't have somebody to love, somebody to share intimately with, somebody who understands, somebody who cares, somebody who really needs you, somebody who really wants you, I don't care how many people are around you, I don't care how much money you have, I don't care what position you occupy—you, sir, and you, madam, are lonely.

What are the causes of this loneliness? Why is it such a common fact? I'll tell you several of the causes.

A. Loneliness Is Caused by Rejection

One of the causes is this feeling of rejection that so many people have. So many people have tried to have friends, and they've been rejected. They have been burned, perhaps, in a love relationship. Perhaps they've been spurned. They've been ignored; they've been put down, and their emotions are burned out. They have a deep inner wound, and it hasn't healed, and they don't have what it takes to try it again. They're just not going to do it. They're not going to expose themselves to more hurt.

I had to laugh a while back. I was reading something that Mark Twain said—Mark Twain said, “If a cat sits on a hot stove, he'll never sit on a hot stove again.” But, he went on to say, “He'll never sit on any stove again.” Do you understand what he is saying? He may not get burned the second time, but he's not going to take a chance. And, there are people like that with relationships. I mean, they'd just rather not have anything to do with any stove. They've been burned once.

B. Loneliness Is Caused by Insecurity

And then, there are people very closely akin to this but not exactly the same—not people who have necessarily been rejected, but there are people who just have a basic sense of insecurity. They don't have any sense of self-worth. They don't really see themselves as worthy of being accepted. They don't see themselves as worthy of having a friend. They have never, ever really accepted themselves; and, therefore, they really don't believe that any body else can accept them. And so, rather than building bridges, subconsciously they build walls and they close themselves in.

C. Loneliness Is Caused by Sorrow

I'm going to tell you a third reason that some people are lonely, and it's of no fault of their own, really—but because they've gone through deep sorrow, deep tragedy, deep loss, and they lose their sense of perspective. They feel like nobody really cares, nobody really understands, and nothing really makes sense to them. Job said in the 7th chapter of Job, “*Let me alone*”—“leave me alone”—“*for my days are vanity*” (Job 7:16)—nothing really makes sense.

As a matter of fact, just turn left to the Book of Job. Let me show you a few verses here. You talk about a lonely man! Turn to Job; it's just left of Psalms. And, look with me

in verse 13: *“He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife”*—“even my wife thinks I’ve got bad breath.” That’s really what it says; that’s really what it means. “My breath is repulsive to my wife.” And, and then, he goes to say, “My”—*“I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me”* (Job 19:13–19). That’s sad, isn’t it?

Now, I don’t know that this literally happened. I’m not saying that the Bible is not literally true, but Job here is expressing his heart. I believe ol’ Job had gotten things out of perspective. And, Job, because he had gone through such sorrow and grieving, he had turned inward. And, his sorrow had built a wall and a prism of icicles around about him. Some of you are grieving the loss of a loved one right now or some deep sorrow, and because of that, there’s loneliness there.

D. Loneliness Is Caused by Selfishness

I’ll tell you another reason for loneliness, and that’s selfishness. Now, you can’t control the sorrow that comes, but selfishness, perhaps, you can. You see, there are a lot of people who just are lonely because of their own fault. They are just self-centered. They are wrapped up in their lives. Somebody said, “There is no life so empty as a self-centered life, and there’s no life so centered as a self-empty life”—“no life so empty as a self-centered life.” And, people are not...are living narrow, not in a prism of icicles; they’re living in a prism of Plexiglas made of pride and self-sufficiency. And, they turn themselves inward, and it’s a form of sin. And, sin always separates; sin always isolates and brings death to relationships. That’s one reason some folks are lonely.

E. Loneliness Can be Built In

You know, in a weird sense, loneliness is just built in. In this age and this day in which we live, everything is so depersonalized. Have you been to the Atlanta airport lately? How many of you have been to the Atlanta airport, the new one? Boy, have you? It’s nice. But, I want to tell you, folks—I don’t like it. They take you around these little cars without drivers. “You are now entering Module A; move away from the door.” How do you know I was standing near the door? I can’t even see you. I don’t like that. At least if they’re going to talk to me, they ought to put a little warmth in the voice. Man, you don’t have to go to Atlanta; you just get in a brand new car, and that thing will talk to you: “Hey, stupid, you’re running out of gas.” I said, “It’s bad enough to have a wife to nag you, without a dashboard.” We’re just so depersonalized. You go into a store and buy

something; you'll stand there before the clerk, and you want to buy it. And, you take out the credit card; you put it down, and she'll take the credit card, and run it through that machine, and come back, and fill it out, and you'll sign it. Neither one of you ever look at the other person in the eye. You are a piece of plastic and a number. We're so depersonalized, and we live so in fear.

Joyce and I were visiting, on Christmas Day, some of our lonely people. We went to go see a little lady who lived in an apartment by herself. She lived in not one of the best areas. We had to go through triple locks to get in, and there she was—one of the most precious saints in this church, but alone, shut out, because—and rightly so: I'd have 40 locks on my door. That's hyperbole, but listen; let me tell you something: it is just a part of this age in which we live. Everybody has been so depersonalized. Thank God for Jesus, who gives us a name rather than a number. Amen. When the antichrist comes, he's going to turn this world into one vast concentration camp, and all the inmates will be numbered. But, I want to tell you, dear friend, that Jesus knows His sheep. He calls them; He gives them a name (John 10:3). But, we live in an age of depersonalization. All of these—and many other reasons that I've not mentioned—are things that make this thing called “loneliness” a common fact.

II. Loneliness Is a Crippling Force

I want to say something else about loneliness: not only is loneliness a common fact, but loneliness is a crippling force. Notice that Paul Tournier called loneliness “a devastating malady.” There's been a survey of some people who have had heart attacks, and they found out that 50% of them testified that they were feeling depressed and lonely when they had their heart attack. Of course, that's not to say that all people who have heart attacks have heart attacks because they're lonely; it's not to say either that loneliness is the only cause of heart attacks. But, it still has something to think about. And, some psychiatrist tested those who came to them, and the psychiatrist said that “80% of those who sought psychiatric help came primarily because of loneliness.” And, any body who's dealt with those who are suicidal know that so often it is that deep, deep loneliness—“nobody knows. Nobody cares. Nobody understands.” Whether the person knows, and cares, and understands or not is not the point to them. “Nobody knows. Nobody cares. Nobody understands.” Whether or not they've got it right or not doesn't matter. In their mind, that's the way they see it. Do you know why a lot of people are alcoholics? Loneliness. Do you know why a lot of people overeat? Loneliness. Do you know why a lot of people can't eat? Loneliness. Do you know why a lot of people can't sleep? Loneliness. Do you know why a lot of people oversleep? Loneliness. Do you know why people can't concentrate? Loneliness. They are *“like a pelican [in] the wilderness...like an owl [in] the desert...and [like] a sparrow [on] the [rooftop]”* (Psalm

102:6–7). Well, did God say that *“it is not good that the man should be alone”* (Genesis 2:18)? It is a destructive force.

III. Loneliness May be a Defeated Foe

I want to get to the good part: loneliness may be a defeated foe. Let me tell you why. Let me tell you what the answer to loneliness is. No, I take that back. Let me tell you who the answer to loneliness is, because His name is the name we sang about this morning—Jesus. Are you listening to me? Jesus alone is the answer to loneliness—Jesus alone is the answer to loneliness. And, I’ll tell you why.

In the first place, Jesus understands your loneliness. He knows what it is to be lonely. Did you know that Psalm 102 that I quoted from to begin with is really a Messianic song? Do you know what we mean by “Messianic song”? That means it’s a prophecy of Jesus. These are the words, and these are the feelings—this is the experience of the Lord Jesus. Was Jesus lonely? You read Isaiah chapter 53:3: *“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows”* (Isaiah 53:3). Read John 1:11: *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”* He lived a life of loneliness.

When He died upon the cross, He was suspended between Heaven and Earth. And, because He had taken the sin of the world upon Himself, even God His Father in holy righteousness could not look upon Him, because the Bible says that “God the Father—He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13), and the rabble and the crowd taunted Him. His disciples forsook Him, and Jesus died alone: *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). When David died, David could say, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). But, I want to tell you that Jesus walked that lonesome valley all by Himself. He died alone. Nobody ever really understood the heart of Jesus. Even when He was facing the cross, He could not make His disciples understand. He was like a sparrow on the rooftop alone. He suffered. Now, what does that mean to me? What does that mean to you?

A. Jesus Knows How You Feel

I’ll tell you one thing it means, dear friend: He knows how you feel. You know, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 4: *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). And, I’ll tell you something else: it’s okay to be lonely. You haven’t sinned—you haven’t sinned. Loneliness is not a sin. It may come out of your sin, but it may not, but it’s not a sin. Jesus was lonely.

B. Jesus Meets Your Needs

You see, listen, friend—He knows how you feel. But, I’ll tell you something else: He

alone meets those needs that you have. Do you remember what we said? You had three basic needs. First of all, you have a need for someone to love and to share intimately with—that's Jesus. You may not, but I need somebody real. That's your problem right there, folks: He is real. Well, I need somebody here now. He is here now. He said, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5). You see, Jesus said, *"Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends"* (John 15:15). What a friend we have in Jesus! He's with me. I don't mean to sound overly pious, but Phil, Jesus is as real to me as you are. And, he's always near. Jesus is real. I go for a drive with Jesus. I go for a walk with Jesus. I talk with Jesus. I have a friend, someone that I can love. I love Jesus, and He loves me. And, I can share anything with Him.

C. Jesus Understands You

I'll tell you something else: we all need somebody who understands us, and friend, He does. He knows what I feel; He is touched. *"Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising"* (Psalm 139:2)—*"and thy going out, and thy coming in"* (2 Kings 19:27). *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered"* (Matthew 10:30). He knows; He cares, and He understands. First Peter 5:7 says, *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"* (1 Peter 5:7).

D. Jesus Needs You

I'll tell you something else, friend: He needs me—me. Yes, I'm His Body. I'm His hands, His eyes, and His mouth. As I prayed coming to church this morning, "O God, inhabit my humanity. Lord Jesus, if You want to do something today, do it through me. I'm available. Live in me. Speak in me. Pray in me, and praise in me." He needs me.

Do you remember Zacchaeus? The little guy, who was the tax collector—lonely, despised, rejected, shut off by himself? But, he heard of Jesus, and some strange stirrings went on his heart. And, he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree. He thought maybe he'd just catch a glimpse of Jesus Christ. And, Jesus came along, and looked up in that sycamore tree, and said, "Zacchaeus" (Luke 19:5). Jesus called him right by his name. Do you know what I think he must have thought? "He knows me. He called me by my name." The model prayer begins, *"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name"* (Matthew 6:9). A little girl misquoted it, and she said, "Our Father, which art in Heaven—how does He know my name?" He, the very God in Heaven, knows your name. Zacchaeus says, "He knows me." But then, Jesus said, *"Zacchaeus...come down"*—Zacchaeus said, "He wants me—He wants me." And then, He said to Zacchaeus—*"I must abide at thy house"* (Luke 19:5).

And, He needs me. Friend, I want to tell you, every one of you sitting out there—He knows you, He wants you, and He needs you. Have you got it? He knows you—He knows you right now. And, He knows your name. You are precious to Him. He would

have died for you had there been not one more soul on Planet Earth. He would have died for you alone. He knows the very hairs of your head. He wants you. He needs you. Through Jesus Christ you have significance.

E. Jesus Is Always There

Now, I'll tell you something else, dear friend: not only does He understand how you feel, not only does He meet your need for a friend, but I'll tell you something else—He's always there. He's *"a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24). You may be alone, but never alone.

Romans chapter 8, verses 38 and 39: the Apostle Paul said, *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38–39). He is always there.

We used to sing a song—I don't believe it's in our hymnal: "No, Never Alone." Do you remember that?

*I've seen the lightning flashing, I've heard the thunder roll.
I've felt sin's breakers dashing, which almost conquered my soul.
I've heard the voice of my Savior, bidding me still to fight on.
He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone!*

*No, never alone, no, never alone,
He promised never to leave me.*

—LUDIE D. PICKETT

And friend, if no one else understands, He does. And, if everybody else fails you, He will not. And, when you get to the bottom line, Jesus alone is the answer to loneliness.

Conclusion

Let's bow in prayer.

How to Win in the War with Loneliness

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 14, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 102:7

"I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top."
PSALMS 102:7

Outline

Introduction

- I. Loneliness Is a Common Fact
 - A. Rejection
 - B. Insecurity
 - C. Suffering
 - D. Self-Centeredness
 - E. The Depersonalization of the Modern World
- II. Loneliness Is a Crippling Force
 - A. It Cripples Emotionally
 - B. It Cripples Physically
- III. Loneliness Can Be a Conquered Foe

Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bibles, and turn with me to Psalm 102. And, in a moment, we're going to look at a very interesting verse. This morning, we dealt with the problem of worry—"How to Win in the War with Worry." Tonight, because we're featuring our seniors, I want to continue along that theme a little bit but to change the subject from worry to loneliness. You know, our seniors, many of them, are lonely people because many of their loved ones have stepped over to the other shore. Many times they are shut in and cannot get out—and sometimes, unfortunately so—they're forgotten, and they're lonely. And, I want us, tonight, just to understand what God has to say about loneliness and how to deal with loneliness.

It's an interesting verse we have looked at it in Psalm 102, verse 7. The psalmist said, *"I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top"* (Psalm 102:7). "I'm like a lonely sparrow." Remember, this morning we told you that not a sparrow falls but what the Lord knows about it (Matthew 10:29). Now, the psalmist said, "You know, I'm like

that sparrow.” Here is a sparrow by himself—a little sparrow. What is more insignificant than a sparrow, unnoticed, isolated, unwanted, alone, way up on the housetop? That’s the way the psalmist thought of himself—a sparrow, alone.

Somebody said that loneliness is the number one emotional problem facing Americans today. Just think about it. Thomas Wolfe, the famous novelist, said, “Loneliness is far from being a rare and curious phenomenon.” Now listen to what he said. He said, “It is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.” Now, that’s a big statement. When he says, “It is central”—“it is the central”—“and inevitable fact of human existence,” he’s talking about loneliness. And, none less that Dr. Paul Tournier, the famous Swiss psychiatrist, said this about loneliness: He said, “It is the most devastating malady of our age”—loneliness. And, again, I say that loneliness attacks many of those who are elderly, but not only the elderly. Now, there are three things we’re going to look at tonight:

I. Loneliness Is a Common Fact

And, first of all, it is this—that we’re going to see that loneliness is, indeed, a very common fact. I get lonely sometimes, and you get lonely. What is loneliness anyway?

Well, it’s not solitude; it’s not just simply being alone. A lot of us would like some more solitude. Very frankly, I would like some solitude. Solitude is good for us. Jesus would often get alone by Himself and withdraw from the multitudes. And, I think one of the problems with many of us is that we fear being alone. You can be alone without being lonely. It’s not solitude.

Nor is loneliness being lonesome. There’s a difference between loneliness and lonesomeness. I get lonesome sometimes. When you’re away from home, you get lonesome. And, I travel; sometimes I have to eat in an airport by myself. As a matter of fact, I prepared this sermon—a lot of it—in an airport. And I was lonesome. I was wanting to get home and see Joyce. When I got home, she was there to meet me at the airport. And, many of us are lonesome. But, lonesomeness is just something that happens to us when we’re away from those that we love. And, when we get back home, why, we’re not lonesome any more. That’s not loneliness. Loneliness is devastating. Lonesomeness just hurts a little.

Loneliness is not necessarily being isolated from people. You can be lonely in a crowd. I think it was Thoreau who said, “A city is a place where hundreds of people are lonely together.” You can be lonely in church. There are some lonely people sitting here tonight—a couple thousand people—but they are lonely. And, as a matter of fact, all of the people around them somehow just make them feel more lonely, ’cause they look at all these other people and say, “You know, they have friends. And, they’re happy, and they’re getting along.” And, lonely people are in restaurants. Lonely people are in

theaters. Lonely people are in offices. Lonely people are often in crowds together.

I think that loneliness is a terrible thing. It's not isolation, as it is insulation, where you feel unneeded, uncared for, unwanted, or even unnoticed. You're like a sparrow alone on a rooftop. Psychologists tell us, psychiatrists tell us, human experience teaches us that all human beings, whether you're young or old, we have three basic needs. And, if you tell me you don't have these needs, I'm just going to just kind of smile and think you're not telling the truth.

You have a need to love and to share intimately with other people. You have a need to do that. You have a need for someone to understand you. And, you have a need to be needed and to be wanted. We have a need to love and to share intimately. We have a need to be understood. And we have a need to be needed and to be wanted. Very frankly, there are a lot of people who are not having those three basic needs met, and the result of that is loneliness.

Now, why are people lonely? I mean, what causes this?

A. Rejection

Well, some people are lonely just because they have been rejected and hurt in the past, and they've had some experience where somebody has wounded them. And they just kind of withdraw because they don't want to be hurt again. That's a shame. There are a lot of people like that in the world today. I've met them; I meet them often. They just wrap up in themselves and sort of build a cocoon around them because they can't bear to be hurt again, and the result is loneliness.

I think it was Mark Twain that said, "If a cat sits on a hot stove, he'll never sit on a hot stove again. As a matter of fact," he said, "he'll never sit on any stove again." And I think there are a lot of people like that who've just simply been wounded; they've been hurt. And, as a result, they're afraid to risk, and that's one of the reasons people are lonely.

B. Insecurity

Another reason is that there are so many people today who are basically just insecure. They don't feel worthy; they don't think that anybody could really want them. They don't think that anybody could love them. They don't think they have a right to reach out and have friends. They can't accept other people, because, really, they've never really accepted themselves.

I read in a newspaper a sad story; here it says this: "An eighty-nine-year-old recluse, who had ordered the heat cut off in his house, was found frozen to death in bed, a few feet from a box stuffed with nearly 200,000 dollars in cash, authorities said yesterday." And then, the article went on to say, "His total estate was worth more than one-half million dollars. Yet, there was only one electric light bulb in the house, and there were

no amenities such as a television set or a radio.” Can you imagine that? Here’s an individual freezing to death, absolutely lonely. Now, I don’t know much about that individual, but I would say that individual, whomever it was, had such a low, low, low sense of self-esteem that caused them to live a lonely life and to die a miserable death.

C. **Suffering**

You know, there are a lot of folks who are lonely because they’ve suffered a lot, and it’s especially true about older people. Maybe they have lost a husband, maybe a wife, maybe children. Maybe they’ve known pain. Maybe they’ve known cancer. Maybe they’ve known economic deprivation. And, they suffer and they turn inward because of their suffering, because they don’t feel that anybody understands. And they get very lonely because it grieves them that other people don’t understand the hurt they are going through.

It’s kind of like Job said in Job chapter 7 and verse 16: *“let me alone; for my days are vanity”* (Job 7:16). I was reading tonight about Job, and here is Job in his suffering in Job chapter 19. Here are some of the saddest words, I believe, in all the Bible. Job 19, verse 13: *“He hath put my brethren far from me, and [my acquaintances] are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me”—*does that sound like anybody you know?—*“They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I have called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me”* (Job 19:13–19). Poor old Job—he’s just suffering. And, whether it’s true or whether it’s not, he says, “Nobody loves me; everybody hates me. I am by myself!” Sorrow can do that and can make you feel so very, very lonely.

D. **Self-Centeredness**

I’ll tell you something else, folks: Sometimes lonely people are just mean—not all. Sometimes we’re lonely because we are so self-centered. I know folks who have just turned inward. Their lives are all wrapped up in themselves, and they are so (quote) “self-sufficient” (so they think). They just build a little plexiglas wall all around them, and they pay a high price for that—and that price is loneliness. *There is no life so empty as a self-centered life, and there’s no life so centered as a self-emptied life.* But a lot of people are just so self-centered, and sin does that. Sin always separates; it builds walls and not bridges. I want to be careful to say that most loneliness is not as a result of sin. But, it could be, so I need to mention that.

E. The Depersonalization of the Modern World

You know, just the world we live in is enough to make you lonely. Have you ever noticed how depersonalized we are? I'm in airports a lot. There's an airport that I don't like, and if you're from Atlanta, I'm going to tell you where it is—that Atlanta airport. Now, there are some wonderful airports in America today. Orlando airport is a nice airport. Tampa airport is a nice airport. West Palm Beach airport is a beautiful airport. Phoenix has got a nice airport. I'm going to tell you that Miami airport—"you're about to cause a door to stay open. Move, or we'll crush you." I mean, that machine begins to talk to you, and you know... Have any of you been at that Atlanta airport? Boy, that thing, I mean, it is the most depersonalized thing, you know. It just kind of makes you feel like you're a piece of putty being squeezed through a tube somewhere. Somebody said, "The more machines act like men, the more men will act like machines." Sometimes I watch 'em in that Atlanta airport going down that thing. Nobody looks up or anything. They are just like little machines. And then, today, I mean, your dashboard on your car will nag you: "You're about to run out of gas, stupid."

It's an amazing world that we live in. We go into a store to buy something, and we take out a card, and we put it down. And the person picks up the card, and fills it out, and hands it back to us. And then they give us the thing, and we sign the thing. And the eyes never meet—never even meet eyes with the person behind the counter, many times. You're just a card. You're just a number. You're just a thing. That's the world that we live in. Everybody is scared to death—triple locks on their door. The Europeans that come to our country—I was talking to one last week. He said, "You know, the strange thing about America is that you don't see people on the streets at nighttime in the community. They're all behind closed doors, locked down." Isn't that true? I mean, it's the criminals that are on the streets; it's the people who are behind the bars—I mean, the good people behind the bars, locked in, so many are lonely, and that is especially true about our elderly people. They don't want to be on the street after dark. They get in. They shut the doors. They lock the doors, and they are alone. Now, loneliness is a common fact.

II. Loneliness Is a Crippling Force

And, listen, loneliness is a crippling force; it is, indeed.

A. It Cripples Emotionally

It'll cripple you emotionally. You get alone, and it's going to do something. There are few hurts that are deeper than genuine loneliness. It can be so devastating that it is a leading cause of suicide. One report I read said that "loneliness may cripple us to such a degree that eighty percent of psychiatric patients said they sought help because of

loneliness.”

B. It Cripples Physically

It can cripple you physically. Another survey said that “fifty percent of heart patients were lonely and depressed before they had a heart attack.” Loneliness—it’s something that smothers you.

III. Loneliness Can Be a Conquered Foe

Well, let’s get to the good news. How are you going to deal with loneliness? Loneliness that is a common fact and a crippling force can be a conquered foe. Here’s the point of the message, and you knew it before I ever told you: Jesus alone is the cure for being alone—Jesus alone is the cure for being alone. Many of these things that I’ve talked to you about, the causes of loneliness—you’re not going to be able to do anything about those things. You’re still going to be behind doors. You’re still going to be treated like a machine. People are still going to forget you. Jesus alone is the cure for being alone.

Now, let me tell you that Jesus Christ knew loneliness like no other person. And, you know the Psalm that I read to you—Psalm 102, verse 7 (Psalm 102:7)—did you know that’s what we call a “Messianic psalm”? Do you know what a Messianic psalm is? It’s a psalm of prophecy. It is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. And, really, this verse refers to Jesus. He was the One alone like a sparrow on a rooftop. You see, Jesus knew what it was to be despised and rejected. The Gospel according to Isaiah, in the Old Testament—Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 3—speaks of the Lord Jesus: *“He is despised and rejected of men”* (Isaiah 53:3). Our Lord knew what it was to be rejected. John 1, verse 11 said, *“He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:11). He was lonely in the midst of the crowd—He was lonely in the midst of His people, the people Israel. When Jesus Christ died, He died alone. Matthew chapter 27 and verse 46: *“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). He died alone, suspended between heaven and earth. When David died, David could say, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4). But Jesus died alone.

Now, I tell you that, lonely person—and I’m talking, I’m sure, to some lonely person listening on the radio. You wish that you could be here tonight. You can’t even get out. We send our love to you. But more than that, I send God’s love to you, because the Lord Jesus, who was alone, was alone for your sake, that He might have us learn what the Bible teaches in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 15: *“For we have not an high priest [who] cannot be touched with the feeling of our [infirmity]; but was in all points tempted”*—that

is, “tested”—*“like as we...yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). Remember what I told you? That the basic human instinct—that all people have those three needs. Remember what they were again? Someone to love, someone who understands, and someone who needs us and wants us. Do you know His name? It’s Jesus—Jesus. Jesus is that One who meets your deepest need—someone to love. Jesus said, “I don’t call you servants anymore. I call you friends” (John 15:15). What a friend we have in Jesus! He is a friend.

You know, He’s a personal friend to me. Jesus Christ is as real to me as Sonny Tucker, or Bob Sorrell, or these three lugs over here. Jesus Christ is real to me. I mean, He is a real friend to me. And, every Christian who knows the Lord Jesus knows that is true. I mean, I talk with Jesus—when I’m in the car, especially. If you see me in the car, I’m either praying, talking to myself, or talking to Jesus. Well, that’s praying. But, sometimes not even praying—just talking, saying, “Lord, that’s beautiful,” or “Thank You for that, Lord”—just talking with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a personal friend. And, He’s with me constantly, so I’m never alone. The darkest night—the most lonely road. I appreciate the song “At the End of the Road the Lord Jesus is There with Us.” He meets that need. He will. He’s always there. Someone to love, and someone who understands—if you’re looking for another human being to understand you, forget it—forget it. *“What man [knows] the things of a man, save the spirit of man [that’s] in him?”* (1 Corinthians 2:11). Joyce doesn’t completely understand me. I know she knows and thinks I don’t understand her. Well, that’s all right. No man understands any woman. But Jesus understands.

Psalm 139, verses 1 and following: *“O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. [There’s] not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether”* (Psalm 139:1–4). Now, don’t think that that the psalmist is saying that in a threatening way. He’s not saying, “Oh, if you’ve done something bad, He knows. He’s making a list and checking it twice.” Listen, He knows your heartaches. He knows your joys. He knows those inexpressible things that no other human being can know. What a friend we have in Jesus!

And then, not only does the Lord Jesus meet the need of someone to love you and someone you can love; He calls you a friend. Not only does the Lord Jesus Christ totally, completely, know and understand your lonely heart, but friend, the Lord Jesus needs you and He wants you. That’s so important—that you are valuable to Him, someone who deeply, deeply desires you. You see, the Lord doesn’t just love us all; He loves us each. He loves you like there was no one else to love.

When we go to Israel, we go down to Jericho, and the guide always points out a

tree. And he says, “That’s the sycamore tree that Zacchaeus climbed up in.” Well, of course, that’s not true. There is no sycamore tree that is a couple of thousand years old. But there is a sycamore tree in Jericho, and there was a little fellow named Zacchaeus who climbed up into that sycamore tree. And you remember the story; we learned it in Sunday School.

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man,
and a wee little man was he.
He climbed up in a sycamore tree,
for the Lord he wanted to see.*

And the Lord said, “Zacchaeus, you come down—

for I’m what? How does it go? “I’m going to your house today.” I just wanted to check; I knew that. I wasn’t sure Jim was awake. “I’m going to your house today!”

What do you think Zack thought when he was up in that tree? Well, the Lord came by, and here are all of the people. I mean, there is a crowd—such a crowd that Zacchaeus has to climb up and get out on a limb to see our Lord. And by the way, if you are interested enough to get out on a limb, you may see Him too—and the Lord came by and said, “Hey, Zack. Come on down. Let’s go get something to eat.”

And do you know what Zacchaeus must have thought? Three thoughts: number one, He knows me. He knows me. Jesus called him by name. I don’t know that they had ever met. Of course, He knew many things that ordinary human beings don’t know. But of all of this crowd, how would you feel? How would you feel if the president of the United States was walking in a parade, and he just stops and walks over to you in a crowd, and he calls you by your name? That’s the way Zacchaeus is! I mean, He says, “Zacchaeus.” Zacchaeus says, “He needs me.” And then He says, “Zacchaeus, come down!” And Zacchaeus says, “He wants me.” And then He says, “I want to go to your house.” And Zacchaeus says, “He loves me. He knows me. He needs me. He loves me.”

Oh, friend, listen. That is what Jesus Christ is saying to every person here. You are needed. You are valuable to Him. He would have died for you if you had been the only person on earth who needed a Savior. And He is always there. Never alone! Never alone! Romans 8, verses 38 and 39: *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Conclusion

Now before I close the message tonight, let me give you some practical advice if you are a lonely person. Let me give you some practical advice. If you are a lonely person,

do you know what you need to learn to do? Stop feeling sorry for yourself that you are lonely, commit your life to Jesus, fellowship with Jesus, and then, because Christ is in you, begin to reach out to other people in your loneliness. If you are lonely, remember there are a lot of other people who are lonely, and you can be a blessing to them.

If you are a shut-in, why don't you get a stack of cards and begin to write notes to people? Why don't you keep a prayer list? Get some telephone numbers; call people. Don't make the call long now. They'll dread to have you call if you call and talk their ears off. Just call and say, "Hi. I wanted to say I'm thinking about you, praying for you. Have a wonderful day! It's a beautiful day! God loves you and I love you." You'd be surprised what a little call like that would mean to somebody. Just call them. Some people just don't even get a call. And again, to pour your life, if you're a lonely person, into the life of someone else who is lonely. And you know what? I believe God's blessing will come back to you.

And I'm so glad that we learned this morning that Jesus is the answer to those of us who are prone to worry. And learn tonight that Jesus is the answer to those of us who are sometimes lonely.

Let's bow in prayer. Father, I pray tonight that you will just seal the message to our hearts. And Lord, I thank you that we have in *Jesus "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* In His holy name, we pray. Amen.

Israel and Bible Prophecy

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 2, 1985

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 102:13–16

“When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.”

PSALMS 102:16

Outline

Introduction

- A. Israel Is the Geographic Center
- B. Israel Is the Revelation Center
- C. Israel Is the Spiritual Center
- D. Israel Is the Prophecy Center
- E. Israel Is the Storm Center
- F. Israel Is the Peace Center
- G. Israel Is the Glory Center
- H. Israel Is the Center of Everything
- I. The Miracle of Her Generation
- II. The Miracle of Her Preservation
- III. The Miracle of Her Restoration
- IV. The Miracle of Her Regeneration

Conclusion

Introduction

Now, I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me, please, to Psalm 102:13, and we begin reading in verse 13. This is a marvelous prophecy concerning our Lord and the land of Israel. The subject today is “Israel and the Bible Prophecy.” People sometimes ask me, “Pastor, why do you keep going back to the land of Israel?” I want to tell you—because I love the land, and I love the people of that land. I love the Jewish people; they are God’s chosen people. And, this verse will help to express why we go to the nation Israel. Psalm 102:13–16: *“Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.”* Put a star by that verse: *“When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory”* (Psalm 102:16). That is, if we want to see when our Lord is coming in glory, we need to keep our eyes on Zion that is God’s Holy Land.

I go to the nation Israel for two reasons. One is I love her past. I love to look back and see the land where my Savior lived, and walked, and talked, and to study the Bible on location. What a blessing that is! How that causes the Bible to burst aflame in your very hand! But, not only do I want to see the past—I want help in understanding the present and the future, because there is Bible prophecy yet to be fulfilled. And, how real it makes it to us when we study that land!

I have told you before that the Jews are God’s chosen people, and they are also the people of destiny. As the Jew goes, so goes the world. If you want to know what God is up to in this world, in this day, and in this in this age, study the land of Israel and the people of that land, because the Jews are God’s yardstick—they are God’s outline; they are God’s blueprint; they are God’s program for what He is up to in the rest of the world.

And, therefore, I’m bringing this message, which, by the way, is the first part of a two-part message. I don’t want to make the mistake in this service that I made in the eight o’clock service when I said, “This message will continue ’till the evening service.” Some people got up and started to leave. No, what I mean by that is that I’m going to start the message this morning and then the last point will be concluded in the evening message when I am speaking this evening on the mark of the beast, the devil’s credit card. And, you’ll want to be here at 6:30 for the evening service, as we deal with this subject of Bible prophecy—but today, Israel in Bible prophecy. And, I want to mention four miracle prophecies that have been fulfilled and are being fulfilled before our very eyes today.

But, let me say again that the land of Israel, the land that many of us call the “Holy Land,” is what I consider to be the most important spot on the face of the earth. The most important city on earth is not Washington, nor Moscow, but Jerusalem. And, the most important land, believe it or not, is not America, but is that tiny little land about the size of New Jersey that we call the “land of Israel.” It is the very center of the world.

A. **Israel Is the Geographic Center**

It is the geographic center. Ezekiel 5, verse 5 says, “*I have set it in the midst of the nations*” (Ezekiel 5:5). And, that land is strategically located—the hub of three mighty continents. Asia, Africa, and Europe are all tied together. It is the confluence of those three mighty landmasses. That’s the reason the land of Israel is called “the naval of the earth”; it is the geographic enter.

B. **Israel Is the Revelation Center**

But, not only is it the geographic center—it is the revelation center, because from this land we got the Word of God. It was the land of Moses, and of the prophets, and of the apostles, and so it is the revelation center of the world.

C. **Israel Is the Spiritual Center**

But, not only is it the revelation center of the world—it's the spiritual center of the world because it's the land of the dear Savior. It was in this land, in Bethlehem, that Jesus was born. It was in this land, in Nazareth, that Jesus grew to maturity. It was in this land, in Galilee, that Jesus walked and talked on the hills and the mountainsides of Galilee and beside the blue lake of Galilee. It was in this land in Jerusalem that our Lord was crucified and buried. It was in this land that our Lord was raised from the dead. It was in this land from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascended and went to Heaven. And, it is to this land, that Mount of Olives, that Jesus shall come again. *“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives”* (Zechariah 14:4).

D. **Israel Is the Prophecy Center**

It is the spiritual center of the world. It is the prophecy center of all of the world. The land of Israel is the only land the people of Israel...the only people whose future is pre-written history called “prophecy,” and the details of this land and these people are minutely written down. That's the reason that I've said if you want to know what God is up to, if you want to know what God is doing, then you can study this land of Israel and the people of this land because it is the prophecy center.

E. **Israel Is the Storm Center**

I want to say that it is the storm center—the storm center—of the world. The great trouble spot in the world is the Middle East—specifically, the land of Israel. The Bible says that *“Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people”* (Zechariah 12:3)—and indeed, it is. And, as we were there, we could see, as you can see, even by reading your newspaper, the gathering storm clouds of Armageddon. It is the storm center.

F. **Israel Is the Peace Center**

But, I want to say, dear friend, it is also the peace center. There will be peace in the world when there is peace in Jerusalem, and that is the reason that we are told to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. And, we ought to be praying, “O God, send peace to Jerusalem.” There will never be peace on earth until there's peace in Jerusalem. And, there will never be peace in Jerusalem until Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, rules and reigns from Jerusalem. And so, when we're praying for the peace of Jerusalem, we're praying, *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Revelation 22:20). And, we want our Lord to reign from Zion and to sit upon the throne of His father, David.

G. **Israel Is the Glory Center**

And, I want to say, dear friend, that when that happens, it will be the glory center of the world, for all of the nations of the world shall come to Jerusalem for to worship. And, Jerusalem shall be the capital city not only of Israel, but of the entire world. And,

*The Word of the Lord shall go forth from Zion,
And Jesus shall reign wherever the sun doth His successive journeys run.
His kingdoms spread from shore to shore
'Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

H. **Israel Is the Center of Everything**

It is the very center of everything, dear friend. And, that's why we go; that's why we study, and that's why I'm preaching this morning this message on Israel and Bible prophecy. And, I want to mention to you today four prophecies concerning the Jews and their land.

I. **The Miracle of Her Generation**

The very first prophecy I want to call “the prophecy and the miracle of her generation”—the miracle of Israel’s generation—how Israel came to be a nation to begin with. If you were to open your Bible now—and don’t do it right now—but to Genesis 17, you would find out that God gave to Abraham, who was the father, the progenitor, of the Jewish people, a promise. God said to Abraham, “Abraham, I’m going to give you a land, and I’m going to give you a seed, a decendency, a progeny.” Now, God gave Abraham the land that we call “the land of Israel.” He gave it to him irrevocable—God gave it to Abraham irrevocable. It is that promise. And then, God said to Abraham, “Abraham, I’m going to give you a son, and through that son all of the nations of the world are going to be blessed” (Genesis 17:16). Now, when God said this to Abraham, he was just a lad of 70 years of age, and his wife, Sarah, was 60 years of age.

When Sarah heard that they were going to have a child, she blushed and laughed. It was hard for her to believe that, because she had already passed the age of having children. Her womb was now dead, and she laughed at the idea of Abraham being able to sire a child; and she just laughed. But, God said, “Why is Sarah laughing?” And, God, in order to make it even more difficult, waited 30 more years when Abraham was 100 years of age and Sarah was 90 years of age. And, God gave them a child, and the child that God gave was a miracle child. That little baby was born of a miracle.

Now, I want to tell you something, friend: every Jew that you see walking the streets of Jerusalem or Memphis, Tennessee, is here as the direct result of a miracle birth. Therefore, our precious Jewish friends should have no difficulty believing in the virgin birth, because, dear friend, every one of them are here because of a miracle birth. God performed a miracle, and every Jew today is here because of a miracle. That’s what I want to call “the miracle of her generation”—the generation of this people.

II. The Miracle of Her Preservation

But, not only has that prophecy been minutely and wonderfully fulfilled, miraculously fulfilled, but there's a second miracle prophecy—not only the miracle of her generation, but the miracle of her preservation. Not only did God bring this nation into being as a miracle nation, but God keeps this nation as a miracle nation.

Now, you're in Psalm 102, so turn left to Psalm 89 with me for just a moment, and let me show you another wonderful, wonderful prophecy here that has been fulfilled. This is a prophecy concerning David, Israel's greatest king and the decadency of David. Now, notice in Psalm 89, verse 20: *"I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him"* (Psalm 89:20). It is clearly a Psalm about David. Now, notice verse 27: *"Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven"* (Psalm 89:27–29). Now, what is God saying? God is saying, "The descendants of David shall endure."

Now, in verse 30, you see something remarkable. God looked down through the tunnel of time, and God said, *"If his children"*—that is, David's descendants—*"forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments"*—and, by the way, they have forsaken God's law, and they have not walked in His judgments—*"If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments"*—they have broken His statutes; they have not kept His commandments—*"Then"*—God says in verse 32—*"will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless"*—now, put a circle around the word *nevertheless* or a star by it, an arrow pointing to it—*"Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah"* (Psalm 89:30–37), which means, "think about that."

Now, what is God saying? God has said here that the Jew would be disobedient, and they were. God said that the Jew would be disbursed, and they were. God said that the Jew would be discredited, and they were. But, God said that the Jew would not be destroyed. They may be chastised; they may suffer, but God said, "I will keep My word to David; his seed shall endure" (Psalm 89:36). And, every Jew that you see here today, dear friend, is here because of God's miracle-keeping power, His preserving power, upon His chosen people. You can study history and see that the devil, Israel's ancient foe, has tried to eradicate this nation and tried to obliterate this promise, but he could not do it.

I want to say that the king of Egypt could not diminish God's chosen people. The Red Sea could not drown God's chosen people. Jonah's whale could not digest God's

chosen people. Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace could not burn God's chosen people. The gallows of horrible Haman could not execute God's chosen people. The nations of this world have not been able to assimilate God's chosen people. The dictators of this world have not been able to annihilate God's chosen people. They have suffered, but they have endured because God's Word prophesied by a miracle prophecy that they would endure.

You say, "What's so great—a miracle about that?" My dear friend, when other peoples have been taken from their homelands, when they have been disbursed before long, they have been absorbed, they have been assimilated, they have been swallowed up, they have been diminished. They cannot be traced, but for 18 centuries the Jewish nation has continued. They have kept themselves together for centuries; they are still clinging to their traditions, to their laws, to their statutes, and even to their language. God has preserved them a nation.

Now, God said He would "*visit their...iniquity with stripes*" (Psalm 89:32)—and indeed, He has. They have suffered unmentionable atrocities under Pharaoh. They suffered under Nebuchadnezzar. And, how they suffered under Nebuchadnezzar, under Alexander the Great, and the Greeks! They suffered under Nero and the Romans. They suffered under the Turks. They suffered under Hitler. They suffered under Russia. They are now enduring suffering under the Arab nations. They have suffered, but friend, I want you to know that they have endured because God prophesied that they would endure. You could no more destroy the Jewish race than you could destroy the sun, the moon, and the stars, according to Psalm 89.

Jeremiah said about the same thing. Turn to Jeremiah chapter 31, and look with me at a very wonderful promise. Jeremiah chapter 31—I'm going to begin reading, in just a moment, in verse 35, when you find it. I'll wait a moment for you to find it because it's worth looking at. I am talking about the miracle of the preservation of this nation. Here's what God's prophet Jeremiah said: "*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me*"—what ordinances is he talking about? He's talking about the sun, the moon, and the stars—"If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever"—now, if you want to get rid of the nation Israel, ladies and gentlemen, according to this passage of Scripture, you would have to get rid first of the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Now, notice in verse 37—"Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:35–37).

Now, what is God saying? God is saying, “I’ll tell you when I’ll cast off Israel: I’ll cast off Israel the same day you can tell Me how high is up. I’ll cast off Israel the same day you can show Me what this earth suspended in space is resting upon; when you can pluck the stars, and the moon, and the sun from God’s Heaven; when you can tell Me how high is high; and when you can show Me what the earth rest upon” Then, God says, “Israel will no longer endure.” What is God saying? God is saying that you’d have to luck the sun, and the moon, and the stars from the hands of God before you could annihilate this nation. They are here, my friend, as a miracle nation. And, they stand beside the graves of their persecutors, and they live on. And, Zion now is blooming and blossoming as a rose. And, if you study history, you’re going to find out that the indestructible Jew has left his indelible mark upon history. They’re not a great people in number. One-fourth of one percent of the world’s population is Jewish—one-fourth of one percent. And yet, they have one-twelfth percent or more of all of the honors in medicine, and in health, and in music, and in public life, and in science. It is an amazing thing.

Did you know with one-fourth of one percent of the population that, in the last twenty-five years, twenty-five percent to one-third of the Nobel Prize winners have been Jews? Think of that—just one-fourth of one percent, and yet twenty-five percent to one-third of the Nobel Prize winners have been from the loins of Abraham. But, what a mark they’ve made upon our world! Listen, friend, when you think of the history of America, did you know that it was a Jew that financed Christopher Columbus when he set voyage to sail to the west? It was a Jew that financed that. Did you know that it was a Jew that first set foot on this soil at the first landfall? A Jew—one of the crewmembers. Did you know that it was a Jew, Hiram Solomon, that financed General George Washington in our Revolutionary War? Did you know that? Did you know that the Jews have left their mark upon all of us in so many ways?

Have you ever taken an aspirin? You’ve had a headache and taken an aspirin? Bayer, who developed aspirin, was a Jew. Have you been vaccinated for Polio? Salk and Sabin were Jews. Have you ever had a heart condition and the doctor prescribed Digitalis? Traube was a Jew. Have you ever gone to the dentist and had him deaden your gum before he started to drill away? Well, Einhorn, who developed Novocain, was a Jew. Now, if you’re an anti-Semite, the next time you go to the dentist, why don’t you say, “Just drill away; don’t deaden my pain.” All right. Now, listen to me, dear friend. You’ve gotten married and gone to see whether you had some insipient disease—some disease there—they gave you a Wassermann test. Wassermann was a Jew. You got sick, and the doctor prescribed for you Streptomycin. Waxman, who developed that, was a Jew. You’ve gone to the psychiatrist and had psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, was a Jew.

Have you been helped by the Salvation Army, or have you helped the Salvation Army and been blessed by the Salvation Army, as all of us have? William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, had a Jewish mother, which, according to the law of return, would make William Booth a Jew. Are you a student of philosophy? Spinoza was a Jew. You say, “Well, I’m a Roman Catholic.” The first popes were Jews. It’s an amazing thing, dear friend, as we study the mark that God’s chosen people have made upon this world. As a matter of fact, you could say that all history revolves around the lives of six Jews. I’m going to put five on one hand and one on the other hand. On my left hand, I’m going to mention Moses, I’m going to mention Paul, I’m going to mention Karl Marx, I’m going to mention Sigmund Freud, I’m going to mention Albert Einstein. Now, you think of those five Jews. On this hand, I’m going to mention Jesus Christ because He stands alone—but six Jews, who have dramatically affected the course of history. And, our lives have been touched and changed by the lives, the impact, of these people. I’m talking to you about a prophecy of preservation. God said, “I am going to preserve these people,” and He has.

III. The Miracle of Her Restoration

Now, the third prophecy I want to mention is not only the prophecy of her generation, not only the prophecy of her preservation, but the prophecy of her restoration, as God has brought these people back into the land. In my estimation, the most amazing and wonderful thing that has happened in our lifetime has not been the end of World War 2. It has not been planting a man on the moon, but the most amazing thing happened in May 14 and 15, 1948, when the nation of Israel was reborn, reconstituted, as a nation. I was playing high school football at that time. Little did I realize I had to study history to learn the impact. The most wonderful thing was that God has fulfilled Bible prophecy.

You’re in the Book of Jeremiah. Just keep turning ’till you come to the Book of Amos here for a moment, and I want to show you a very wonderful, wonderful promise and prophecy here in the Book of Amos. Amos chapter 9 and verses 14 and 15—here’s what God says: God said, “*And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God*” (Amos 9:14–15). God says, “I’m going to bring them back, and I’m going to plant them there; and no one will uproot them.” And, dear friend, God has brought them back, and I want to tell you, they are back there to stay regardless of what any one says about it. Their very being there was a military miracle. When the nation of Israel was born in 1948, the 650,000 Jews were surrounded by six Arab states and 40 million enemies that had sworn to drive them in the sea. I

wish we had time to talk about the war of 1948 and to tell you how God miraculously preserved this little nation.

Before that time a Jew was subject to arrest for even carrying a gun, but by the time the UN called for an armistice they were 150 miles into Egyptian territory—people who were supposed to be pushed off into the sea. The same thing happened in the Sixth Day War, 1967, as again God seems to have been not neutral in that war that was over in six days. Somebody said humorously that “they had to get the war over in six days,” that “all of the tanks were rented from Hertz rental, and they had to get them back by the seventh day.” But, in six days, they won that war. The same was true in 1973. I believe it was the Yom Kippur War, and God seemed to have somehow miraculously intervened. And, with a military miracle, the same is going to take place, dear friend, when Russia invades the Middle East.

Read Ezekiel 38 and 39 (Ezekiel 38; Ezekiel 39). And, there—don’t do it now; we don’t have time—but you read it when you get home, and you’re going to find out that will come in these last days an invasion from Russia. And, Soviet Russia will be brought to her knees on the mountains of Israel. Read it; it is an amazing prophecy. The time is coming when the battle of Armageddon is going to be fought. And, God, one more time, is going to come to the rescue of His people in that great final war for Israel and for her independence.

As a matter of fact, let me tell you this clear fact: a few years ago there was a great debate in the United States about the neutron bomb. You remember that? The neutron bomb is a bomb that kills not primarily by the flash of fire, not primarily by percussion, but by radiation—that is, to leave buildings standing. And, there was a great debate about how inhuman it was to take lives like this with a neutron bomb. And, some did not want the United States to go further into the development of the neutron bomb. What some do not realize is that there are experts who believe that from 1977 that Israel has already had a neutron bomb.

Turn with me, if you will, to Zechariah chapter 12. Now, you’re almost to the New Testament. Just keep on turning there, and you’ll come almost to the end of the Old Testament. You’re almost to Zechariah; turn to Zechariah chapter 12, and look in verse 2: *“Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it”* (Zechariah 12:2–3). God prophesied that battle of Armageddon, when the forces of antichrist that we’ll preach about tonight will be gathered against Jerusalem... Now, the Jews no longer have what they call the “Masada Complex.” But, they have now what they call the “Samson Complex.” On Masada, 960 of them

committed suicide rather than become Roman slaves. But now, they're saying that if we go down, we'll be like Samson. They will be cut down with us. And, there are those who believe that Israel has the bomb, and Israel is prepared to use the bomb.

With that in mind, look in Zechariah 14, verse 12: *"And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth"* (Zechariah 14:12). This is the judgment. The man who wrote the book on Hiroshima and Nagasaki said that, when that radiation came, that people's eyeballs melted in their skulls and ran down their faces like tears. And then, the flesh melted from their face. That's what Zechariah seems to be talking about here; listen to it: *"Their flesh shall consume away while they stand [on] their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth"* (Zechariah 14:12). There's coming that battle—that great battle—but one more time, the Bible says that "the Lord will fight for Israel" (Exodus 14:14). There's the miracle, dear friend, of her restoration.

IV. The Miracle of Her Regeneration

The last miracle, and I have no time for that—but I'll preach about it tonight—and that is the miracle of her regeneration. I want to show you here what Zechariah says, and what a blessing it is! The Bible says in Zechariah 12, verse 10: *"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn"* (Zechariah 12:10). What a blessing that is going to be in that day! Chapter 13, verse 1: *"there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness"* (Zechariah 13:1).

Conclusion

I'll talk about that tonight, but oh, friend, listen—I want to remind you of the verse that I started with—Psalm 102 and verse 16: *"When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory"* (Psalm 102:16). One of the signs that Jesus Christ is coming, and coming soon, is the sign that Zion is being built up. And then, the Lord shall—He shall appear—in His glory.

How to Turn Thanksgiving into Thanksliving

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 23, 1986

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 107:21–22

*“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and declare his works with rejoicing.”*

PSALMS 107:22

Outline

Introduction

- I. Presenting Your Person as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving
 - A. The Reason for It
 - B. The Requirement of It
 1. You Must Do It Voluntarily
 2. You Must Do It Completely
 3. It Must Be Bound to the Altar
- II. Presenting Your Praise as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving
- III. Presenting Your Prayer as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving
- IV. Presenting Your Possessions as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving
- V. Presenting Your Pure Life as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

Conclusion

Introduction

“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving and declare his works with rejoicing” (Psalm 107:21–22). Now if you don’t mind writing in your Bible, would you underscore those phrases right there—“the sacrifices of thanksgiving” and “*declare his works with rejoicing.*” Now it has been said that talk is cheap. We thank the Lord, and we say, “Lord, we’re so thankful; we’re so grateful for all that you’ve done for us.” Well, do you know what we need to do? We need to turn thanksgiving into *thanksliving*—that is, to offer to God the sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Now if we’re thankful, then it really ought to show in our lives. And by the way, I don’t believe that there’s any other sin quite like the sin of ingratitude. Shakespeare said, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.” Those of you who have loved, labored, and invested much in the health and lives of your children know

how grieved you are when your children do not seem to appreciate or to be thankful for the sacrifices that you, as parents, have made. Mothers, who have gone down in the valley of the shadow of death to bring these precious children into this world, and dads, who have labored long and hard—what a sacrifice—and I think Shakespeare was right. The poet Milton—the blind poet—said that a person with an ungrateful spirit only has one vice, because all of the rest of his vices are virtues compared to ingratitude. Every other sin is a virtue compared to the sin of ingratitude. *How terrible not to be grateful to God, and yet in America, all around we can find those who are grumbly hateful rather than humbly grateful.*

How can we translate our thanksgiving today into *thanksgiving*? Well, we're to offer to God what the Bible calls "the sacrifices of thanksgiving." Now over in 1 Peter, chapter 2—don't turn to it—but 1 Peter chapter 2, tells that those of us who are saved are priests (1 Peter 2:9). You're looking at a Baptist priest. Have you ever seen a Baptist priest before? I'm a Baptist priest, and you're a priest. Now I don't walk into my collar—back into my collar—but I'm still a Baptist priest, and you are a priest. All of those of us who are saved are priests of God, and every priest ought to be able to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

Peter tells us that, because we're priests, we're to offer up spiritual sacrifices. I've gone through God's Word, and I've found five spiritual sacrifices—sacrifices that you can offer all this week and the rest of your life as unto the Lord. I'm going to call them today "the sacrifices of thanksgiving," and I want you to make a little checklist—maybe put it in your Bible and see: "Am I continually offering to the Lord these five spiritual sacrifices that we're going to call today "the sacrifices of thanksgiving?"

Because, I want say again that talk is cheap. You can say, "Oh, we're thankful, and we eat a big meal, and watch football." Now folks, it ought to go a little further than that. You ought to have more in your Thanksgiving than stuffing yourself and then becoming a couch potato. You need to do something else besides that in order to show how thankful to God you are.

I. Presenting Your Person as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

We're going to do a little Bible searching. Let's turn, first of all, to Romans chapter 12, and I want to talk to you about presenting yourself as a sacrifice. There is what I'm going to call the sacrifice of your very person—of yourself. Look, if you will, in verses 1 and 2: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Romans 12:1–2).

Now notice, in verse 1, he talks about a living sacrifice. All the way through, we're going to be talking about that word *sacrifice*, okay? Now the very first sacrifice that we're going to offer is what we call a *living sacrifice*, which is your body. Now why should I do that? Well, notice what the Apostle Paul says: "*I beseech you therefore, brethren...*" (Romans 12:1). It's almost as if he's on his knees in front of you.

And who was speaking when Paul spoke? God was speaking. Now often we talk about our prayer to God. This is God's prayer to man. Have you ever thought about God praying to you? That's what He's doing. He's saying, "I beseech you; I plead with you." Now if the Lord Jesus were to come, get in front of you, fold His hands, look upon your face, and say, "I beg you—do this." Would you do it? Would you do it—if the Lord were to get on His knees in front of you, pray to you, and ask you to do something? That's what He's doing right here—the Lord is beseeching you.

A. **The Reason for It**

Here's the reason for it: "*by the mercies of God*"—on the basis of what God has done for you. Why should I give my body to Him? Because He gave His body for me. He suffered, bled, and died upon that cross, and, when we drove those nails into His hands, His quivering heart was saying, "I love you; I love you." Those nails were my sins, and my hard heart was the hammer that drove those nails into the palms of Jesus. And yet, he suffered, bled, and died for our sins. All of Romans, chapter 1 right on up to chapter 12, tells us about the mercies of God; and then, the Apostle Paul says, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, [because of] the mercies of God,—because of God's goodness—that ye present your bodies...unto [Him]*" (Romans 12:1). You see,

Drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe:

Here, Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do.

—ISAAC WATTS

B. **The Requirement of It**

Now that's the reason for it, and what is the requirement of it? How must I give myself of him? Well, let me suggest three ways as this Thanksgiving season you want to present a living sacrifice to the Lord.

1. **You Must Do It Voluntarily**

Well, the very first thing I want to say is that you must do it voluntarily—nobody can make you do it. Do you see the word *present*? That's the word for a man joining an army voluntarily. Now there are two ways to get in the army: you can go down and present yourself, or they can draft you, huh? Now he's talking here about a volunteer. There's nobody who can make you do this. You must do it willingly. So that's the first thing. You must willingly say, "Here, Lord, of my own free will, I present myself." Have you done that? Have you just laid yourself upon the altar?

2. You Must Do It Completely

Now secondly, not only must you do it willingly, but you also must do it completely, now that you present your body as a living sacrifice—wholly. Now that word w-h-o-l-l-y is akin to our word w-h-o-l-e, which means “complete,” that you give yourself “completely.” Have you done this? Completely? You see, look—a sacrifice doesn’t have any more plans of its own; a sacrifice will be slain. We’re to die to the old way. My wife, my children, my home, my car, my vacation, my future, my bank account, and my ambitions—they all belong to the Lord. Have you done that? Have you just said, “Here, Lord, I give myself away—’tis all that I can do”? I do it completely. I do it voluntarily.

3. It Must Be Bound to the Altar

And dear friend, not only was it voluntary, not only was it complete, but let me tell you something else about a sacrifice: Now there was the Old Testament animal sacrifice. The New Testament sacrifice is compared to that. The Old Testament animal sacrifice—after it was stained—was bound to the altar. The Bible says to bind the sacrifice to the altar.

Do you know why it was bound to the altar? Because it would tend to slide off. Have you ever picked up a piece of freshly killed meat? It’s slippery—it’s slippery. And so there were two flesh hooks, and those flesh hooks would bind that sacrifice to the altar. Have you ever made a commitment to the Lord, and then have tended to slide off the altar? Have you? I have many times. I mean, I’ve told the Lord—I have bowed down and declared, “Lord, that’s the last time I’ll ever do that;” or, I’ve said, “Lord, from now on, I’m going to do this everyday. God, you can count on me,” and then I just kind of slide off the altar. Do you ever slide off the altar? You see, look—we need to be bound to the altar if we’re going to have a living sacrifice.

The priest had two flesh hooks. Let me mention two flesh hooks that will keep you bound to the altar. Number one is devotion—your love for Jesus; and number two is discipline. Those are the two flesh hooks that will keep you on the altar: devotion and discipline. One is not a substitute for the other, but together they’ll keep you bound to that altar, so that you will stay locked in place—a living sacrifice, by devotion and discipline, staying there, giving yourself to the Lord. Offer yourself this Thanksgiving to the Lord, and say, “Lord, before I give you anything else, I give you myself completely.”

You know, a lot of us don’t want to be bound to the altar. I’ll guarantee you that we don’t. That’s the reason why some men don’t get married—they don’t want to get bound down to marriage, huh? Sure, they want to stay free; they want to be loose. That’s the reason why some folks won’t join a church. Did you know we have folks here this morning that ought to come and join this church? Do you know why they won’t join the church? They love to drop in and visit, but they don’t want the responsibility of church membership. That’s the reason why some people won’t teach a class. Some of you

have the gift of teaching, but you say, “You know, Pastor, we have a cottage over in thus and such a place—we don’t want to get bound down.” You know, that’s the reason why some folks won’t make a pledge to the building program. They say, “Well now, I just don’t believe in making commitment.” They’re married; they’ve got a mortgage on the house, a mortgage on the car—they don’t believe in making commitments. What they mean is that they believe in making commitments to everybody else except for Jesus. They just don’t want to make a commitment to the most important thing. You know, “I’ll give, as the Spirit moves, but I just don’t want to be bound down,” huh? Hey, I think it’s pretty good to be bound down. I think it’s pretty good to get devotion and discipline, and to say I am giving myself, and that I am making a commitment.

II. Presenting Your Praise as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

All right now, let me mention another kind of a sacrifice. Remember we’re talking about the sacrifices of thanksgiving. First of all, your person. Now right behind that should come the sacrifice of your praise. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 13, and look, if you will, in verse 15: *“By him therefore...”*—and the *him* refers to Jesus—*“By him therefore let us offer up the sacrifice of praise...”*—underscore it: “the sacrifice of praise.” Have you ever thought of your praise as being a sacrifice?—*“the sacrifice of praise to God, continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto his name”* (Hebrews 13:15).

This is a wonderful, wonderful sacrifice, folks, when you offer the sacrifice of praise. I’m going to tell you something that may amaze you: God would rather have your praise than your money. Your praise is of more value to God than whatever you put in the offering plate this morning—that is, if it is genuine praise. I found a verse that proves that—Psalm 69, verses 30 and 31—don’t turn to it; let me read it to you: *“I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.”* (Psalm 69:30–31). Do you know how much an ox was worth in this day? That would be like you going and saying, “I’m going to give my car. I’m going to give my Cadillac. I’m going to give my Oldsmobile.” An ox was extremely valuable. A man who had an ox was a wealthy man. But God says here that your praise, your psalm of thanksgiving, will please the Lord more than your material gifts. Now I want to tell you that praise is no substitute for your material gifts, and we’re going to see that later on, but I’m saying, this morning, if you could only understand how important your praise is, and that your praise ought to be a way of life.

Look at our verse again—verse 15: *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God”*—what’s that next word?—*“continually”*—continually (Hebrews 13:15). Listen to me. You do not come to church to praise the Lord. You’re to bring your praise with you to church. You don’t commence your praise here—you continue your praise

here. You are to praise the Lord continually, and the reason that some of us do such a poor job of praising God, when we come to church to praise him corporately, is that we have not been praising him privately. Psalm 34, verse 1: *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth”* (Psalm 34:1). And we’re to come to the Lord’s house today and just worship the Lord, and we’re to worship Him—not grudgingly. Nobody ought to have to beg us to sing. Brother Whitmire, it ought to break your heart that you should have to stand before a congregation of people, who are supposed to be saved and know Jesus, and plead with them to worship—beg them to sing. No wonder the songwriter said, “Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God.” That you should have to be coerced to sing! The Bible says, in Psalm 119:108, *“Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth”*—the freewill offerings of my mouth. God, help us to offer to Him the sacrifice of praise.

III. Presenting Your Prayer as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

Now there’s a third sacrifice I want to mention. First of all, remember, we give our bodies as a living sacrifice—that’s our person. Secondly, there’s the offering to God, the sacrifice of praise—that’s just the fruit of our lips, continually. It means more, ladies and gentleman, than your giving your wealth. It is to give your worship to our great God. Now here’s the third thing, and it is very closely akin to our praise, but not exactly the same—it’s our prayer. Our prayer—that’s the third sacrifice of thanksgiving. Our prayer. Our person, our praise, and now, our prayer.

Let me give you the verse—are you ready for it? Psalm 141:2—listen to it: *“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.”* Now if you don’t mind marking your Bible again, then underscore the words *“incense; and, the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”* There’s our word *sacrifice* again. In all of these scriptures, we have the word *sacrifice*. Psalm 141:2: *“the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”*

Now your prayer is to be like two things: number one, it is to be like incense; and, number two, it is to be like the evening sacrifice. Now what does this mean? What is incense? Incense is perfume that, in order for that perfume to be released, has to be put on the fire. It is burned, and as it is burned, the aroma is perfume that just goes up in smoke. Now your prayer—the Bible tells us, in Revelation chapter 5, that incense is the prayer of the saints (Revelation 5:8). Incense, in the Old Testament, that ascends—that sweet smelling smoke that goes up—is like our prayer that goes up to God.

The Old Testament Jews worshipped in the tabernacle, and if you were to walk through the front door of the tabernacle, you would come into the tabernacle. And as you approach the tabernacle, there in that outer court is a great altar made of brass that was called *the brazen altar*. There was a fire in that altar, and that fire was kindled from Heaven. Now it’s very important that you understand the following: Aaron, the high

priest, and others—they didn't strike a match in order to light that fire. Of course, they had no matches, but they couldn't light it with fire from any other fire, lightning, or anything else. That fire had to be kindled from Heaven. It was holy fire in that brass altar.

Now you come into the tabernacle. It was on that altar that the animals were burned and consumed. That pictures Jesus dying for our sins. That fire from Heaven pictures the wrath of God—the holy wrath of God against sin. Then, you walk into that tabernacle, and in that tabernacle, on one side, would be a beautiful candelabra. On the other side, there would be a table on which was bread, called showbread, that the priest would eat. And so the altar pictures Christ, our sacrifice. The showbread pictures Christ, our sustenance, as we feed on Him. And then, over here, the candelabra pictures Christ, our sight. Christ, our sacrifice; Christ, our sustenance; Christ, our sight.

And then, we come to another altar, which was a golden altar. Now this golden altar is right in front of a curtain, and, behind that curtain, is the Holy of Holies. The golden altar was the altar of incense. As the priest would come in, in the mornings and evenings, to trim the lamps, he would first go and offer incense upon that golden altar.

But now, let me tell you that the fire in the golden altar was kindled by fire from the brazen altar. It's very important that you understand this—that the priest always had to make certain that the fire that was in this altar was the fire that was in that altar, and the fire in that altar was fire from Heaven. Now he would come in with this incense, which was especially concocted for God alone, and he would burn it. Now of course, if there were no fire in the altar, then no incense would rise to God. If there was *strange fire* in the altar—now, what the Bible calls *strange fire* was fire that God did not ignite—if there was *strange fire*, then there would be swift judgment for offering to God something with *strange fire*—that is, fire that God did not ignite.

You say, "Pastor, what is all of that about?" Our aim is to get on into the Holy of Holies. Now remember, the Holy of Holies is where God is. That's where the *Shekinah* glory of God is: right in that Holy of Holies; and, in that Holy of Holies is where we have communion with God. It is in that Holy of Holies where the glory of God—the *Shekinah* glory of God—was.

Now if the brazen altar is Christ, our sacrifice, if these candlesticks are Christ, our sight, and, if this showbread is Christ, our sustenance, then this prayer is Christ, our supplication—that prayer that ascends to God and that just makes way so we can go into the Holy of Holies with Christ, our satisfaction. Do you understand? Where we know the Lord, where we meet the Lord, where we are satisfied, and where the deepest longings of our heart are met. But friend, you cannot come into the Holy of Holies unless you come to the altar of incense, which is prayer.

But wait a minute—you cannot come to the altar of incense unless you come to the

brazen altar. Don't try to bring to the altar prayer that is not based upon the blood of Jesus Christ. Okay, we enter into the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus Christ. And don't try to offer any prayer that does not have in it the fire of God's sacrifice and God's holiness. And then, when I come to Him, I can burn incense to Him, if that incense is based upon the blood of Jesus Christ. But the Bible says that, "if I regard iniquity in my heart, then the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). Friend, you have no basis to come to God, except by the blood. And when you come by the blood, and then you come to that golden altar, and you begin to pray, like sweet perfume, that prayer goes to God. And that, my dear friend, the Bible calls a sacrifice.

You are a priest. Did you offer any incense this morning? Morning and evening, the priest would go into the tabernacle to trim the lamps. Have you been in there yet? I mean, you say that you love God. You say that you belong to Him. You say that you are a priest. Have you offered the sacrifice of prayer? That's a sacrifice—not just coming to God to get things done. Oh, friend, listen to our verse again. What a beautiful verse it is! Psalm 141:2: *"Let my prayer be set before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."* Isn't that beautiful? The lifting of my hands is the evening sacrifice. Oh, God, just as that Old Testament priest would go in there in the evening to trim the lamps, oh, God, I want to go in. I want to enter into that Holy of Holies, and God, I want to just lift up my hands, spread my hands to you, just as, dear Lord, the evening sacrifice. Incense with *strange fire* was judged; incense with no fire is useless. That fire pictures what Jesus did for us on the cross.

IV. Presenting Your Possessions as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

All right, now, let me mention the fourth sacrifice. The first one, what was it? Our bodies—that's our person; the second, our praise—the fruit of our lips; the third, our prayer; the fourth of these spiritual sacrifices is our possessions.

Now don't think that because something is spiritual that it is has to be immaterial. We are to give our possessions. Now you're in Hebrews, chapter 13, and we read verse 15 that speaks of the sacrifice of praise. Now Hebrews chapter 13—turn back to it. Yes, we've already left it—turn back to it. Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 16—let's look at it: *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16). There again, he uses the word *sacrifice*. Now remember, we're to offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, okay? Now look at it again: *"with such sacrifices God is well pleased."*

What does the word *communicate* mean, anyway? Does it mean to write letters to someone? Does it mean to call someone on the telephone? Well, the old King James says "to communicate," so I looked it up last night in four different translations—four other translations than the King James. One translation gives this word *communicate* as

“to distribute”; the other gives it “to share.” Another gives it “to be generous”; the other gives it “to be liberal.” So to distribute, to share, to be generous, to have a liberal spirit—that’s what it means to *communicate*—not just to talk to people. It means to take our material possessions, the things that God has given us, and when we come to church, or when we give, by whatever means or whatever mode—when we give, it is to be a spiritual sacrifice. The Apostle Paul received a missionary gift from the church at Philippi, and he wrote back and said, in Philippians chapter 4, verse 18: *“The things which were sent from you...[were] a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God”* (Philippians 4:18).

And so today you want to show your thanksgiving—show it in your giving. Does your giving really show what you think of God? It really does, whether you think it or not. You know, there are some folks who come to church on Sunday and they give God a tip. They give God the crumbs. They give God the leftovers.

Do you know what a lot of folks do? I mean, they literally do this: They have their budget—they get the budget out, and they say, “All right, we’ve got so much for the house payment. We’ve got to pay that. We’ve got so much for the utilities. We have to pay that. We have so much for the car payment. We’ve got to pay that. And so much for Sears. We’ve got to pay that. And that much for so and so. Let’s throw Goldsmith’s in—everybody can have a chance. And Dillard’s”—I’ll quit right here—“and we’ve got to pay that. And so we’ve got all these things for which we have to pay.” Then there’s, you know, tuition and these things. And they say, “Now what’s left? What’s left? Do we have anything to give God? What’s left?”

Hey folks, do you know what you ought to do? Before you write a check to anybody or anything else, you ought to make a gift to Jesus first. Do you know what the Bible says? Proverbs 3:9: *“Honour the LORD...with the firstfruits of all thine increase.”* Firstfruits—not what’s leftover. Don’t give God the crumbs. Don’t give God the leftovers. Don’t see if there’s anything left for God. That’s the problem. Listen, friend. God doesn’t want a place in your life. Everybody says give God a place in your life. He doesn’t want it. Well, you say, “Yes, you’re right. Give him a promise in your life.” He doesn’t want a promise. He demands preeminence. You’re to *“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase”* (Proverbs 3:9).

I was reading in Malachi chapter 1, verse 8, and this is what the Lord said to the people of his day: *“And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it not unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 1:8). Do you know what they were doing? They were saying, “Well, we’ve got to make an offering to the Lord. We’ve got an old blind calf over here. Let’s give that blind calf. And we’ve got a sick goat. That goat is not going to live, anyway. Let’s bring it down to the priest, and let the priest kill

it.”

Malachi says, “You’re offering blind animals and crippled animals to God—why don’t you take it over here, give it to the governor, and see if the governor will accept it?” You know there are people who give to God things they wouldn’t give to one another for Christmas presents or for birthday presents—try God. Now folks, listen. We don’t just give to the church because the church needs it. We don’t give to a cause. It’s a sacrifice to God. Friend, if there was not a need in this world, and if we just took the money that was given on Sunday and burned it up—I mean, just put it in a furnace and burned it up—it’d still be a blessing just to come and give it. Do you believe that? I do.

That’s what they did with the Old Testament sacrifices—they burned them up. They weren’t giving to a need; they were giving to God. A sacrifice was put on an altar, and it was consumed. It didn’t serve any utilitarian purpose. They just gave it because they wanted to give it to a great God as a sacrifice, because of His goodness to us. We need to get out of this thing of saying, “Well, I don’t know whether I agree with that.” “Me either—I don’t think I’m going to give to this cause.”

Friend, we’re giving to God. We’re giving to God. It’s a sacrifice to our great God, and, *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity.”*—that is, you’re not giving to a cause. You’re not giving because somebody has made you do it—not giving grudgingly or of necessity—*“for God loveth a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

V. Presenting Your Pure Life as a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving

One last thing, and then I’ll be finished. Not only is there the sacrifice of our possessions, one of the last of these five thanksgiving sacrifices—the sacrifices of thanksgiving—but there is, finally, the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite spirit, which I want to call the sacrifice of purity.

Would you turn to Psalm 51 here for just a moment—and, by the way, all of these sacrifices are based on, first of all, what He has done for us; and, we just turn around and we’ll do back for Him, because of what He has done for us. *“We love him, because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). We give to Him, because He first gave unto us, *“and of thine own have we given [unto] thee”* (1 Chronicles 29:14).

Now look, if you will, in Psalm 51:17: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* That’s the last of these five sacrifices I want to suggest this Thanksgiving. Do you have that sacrifice of a broken and a contrite spirit? Why do I call it the sacrifice of purity? Because David had sinned. And what was it that broke David’s heart? His sin against God.

You see, God was so good. Notice in Psalm 51, verse 1: *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender*

mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). Do you know what it was that led David to a broken spirit? Do you know what it was? It was not David’s badness—it was God’s goodness. The Bible tells us, over in the Book of Romans, that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4)—not the badness of man. God is so good. How can we sin against such love? How can you this Thanksgiving sin against one who suffered, bled, and died for you? If you say that you love Him, then get rid of the sin that breaks His heart. Get rid of it. A broken and a contrite spirit.

Oh, friend, I said that our sins were the nails that nailed Him to that tree, and our hard hearts the hammers that drove those nails. “A broken and a contrite spirit thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). We sin in our churches, some Sunday mornings, acting like we’ve done God a favor when we get here—haughty, unbent, unbroken. Oh, how we ought to bow down before our great God, and just say, “O God, in brokenness and humility, I offer, dear God, tears of repentance, and Lord, purity of life before you, and my sacrifice of thanksgiving. Lord, you’re going to see that, in my life, dear God, there will be no unconfessed, unrepented-of sin in my life.”

Conclusion

Listen to me. Don’t you believe that, if the Bible says we’re to offer God the sacrifices of thanksgiving, that ought to improve our persons; then, it ought to include our prayer; it ought to include praise; it ought to include our possessions; and, it ought to include a pure life. Just say, “This is what I’m going to render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me.”

Sacrifices of Thanksgiving

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 18, 1990

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 107:22

*“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and declare his works with rejoicing.”*

PSALMS 107:22

Outline

Introduction

- I. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Person
 - A. The Sacrifice Is to be Presented
 - B. The Sacrifice Is to be Slain
 - C. The Sacrifice Is to be Whole
- II. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Praise
 - A. Praise Must Come of Free Will
 - B. Praise Must be Continual
 - C. Praise Must be Brought to Church
- III. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Prayers
- IV. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Possessions
- V. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Purity

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to take your Bibles and open, if you would, to Psalm 107:22 for our Thanksgiving message: *“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing”* (Psalm 107:22). I want us to think tonight on “The Sacrifices of Thanksgiving.” Perhaps there are greater sins than the sin of ungratefulness, but I don’t believe there is an uglier sin than the sin of ungratefulness.

I’m not a great student of Shakespeare, of course; I’m like the rest of us. I’ve been exposed to Shakespeare, but here’s what Shakespeare had to say about the sin of ingratitude: Shakespeare said, “I hate ingratitude more than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness, or any cant of vice whose strong corruption inhabits our frail blood.” And then, again, he said, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.” Now, that’s what Shakespeare said.

Let me tell you what Milton said, and I want you to listen very carefully to what the great poet Milton said. He said, “He that is ungrateful has no guilt but one, for all other

crimes may pass for virtues with that man.” That is, if you are ungrateful, dear friend, everything else about you, even if it’s a crime, may seem good, if you have an ungrateful heart.

Again, I want to remind you of what our psalmist has said: *“let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with [thanksgiving]”* (Psalm 107:22). How good and how great God has been to us! Look at Psalm 107, verse 2: *“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy”* (Psalm 107:2). How good God has been to us here at Bellevue Baptist Church!

Now, tonight, as we come to this season of thanksgiving in this harvest celebration, I want to give you five ways that you can turn your thanksgiving into “thanks-living.” Okay? Now, the Bible says here that we’re to offer *“the sacrifices of thanksgiving”* (Psalm 107:22), and I want to mention five sacrifices—five spiritual sacrifices—that we can make. And, we’re going to take the Word of God, and we’re going to look through the Bible. And, five times you’re going to find out how God links our relationship to Him to sacrifice.

Now, in the Old Testament, they sacrificed animals, fruit, and grain. We don’t do that in the New Testament. But, the Bible teaches that we’re to offer spiritual sacrifices. Turn with me, for example, to 1 Peter chapter 2, and look with me for just a moment in verses 3 and following—1 Peter chapter 2, verses 3–5: *“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:3–5). So, the Bible, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, tells us that we’re to offer spiritual sacrifices. I’m going to give you five of them tonight—five spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving. And, if you’ll just take these five things—one, two, three, four, five—and make a note of them, and begin this week and the rest of your life to offer them to the Lord, then, I believe, dear friend, that you will fulfill the commandment of God, which says that you are to have a spirit of thanksgiving.

I. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Person

Now, if you would turn thanksgiving into “thanks-living,” first of all, I want you to offer the sacrifice—the sacrifice, I say—of yourself. Romans chapter 12, verse 1: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Romans 12:1). You want to show God, tonight, that you love Him? Have you ever given your body to the Lord, just simply presented your body to the Lord? What is the reason for this? Listen to it—Romans 12, verse 1: *“I beseech you...brethren, by the mercies of God, that [you] present your bodies a living sacrifice”* (Romans 12:1).

Now, what are the mercies of God? What is the basis of His plea to us? That Jesus Christ suffered, bled, and died for us. We're not our own. We're bought with a price; and because Jesus Christ suffered, bled, and died for us, it's only reasonable, if He gave His body for us, that we would give our bodies back to Him.

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give my self away
'Tis all that I can do.*

—ISAAC WATTS

I have done that. I have done that many times, but I find sometimes that when I do that, I mean it with all of my heart, and then slowly, imperceptibly, I tend to take back things that I've given to the Lord. My heart gets cold and covered over with a lack of love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, sometimes I may not even recognize it, and I go on with the same smile, the same handshake, the same phrases, the same song, the same sermon.

But, it dawns on me, finally—the Holy Spirit breaks through and says, “Adrian, you're not committed as you used to be to Me. There are things that you gave to Me that you've taken back.” And, I have to get alone with the Lord, and I have to get alone in my study, or in my bedroom, or somewhere with our Lord. And, I have to let God take those things, one at a time, and give them back to Him—totally, completely. And, that begins with presenting my body to the Lord, a living sacrifice.

A. **The Sacrifice Is to be Presented**

Now, notice what it says: it's to be voluntary. You are to present your body. God's not going to draft you; God's not going to force you. No one else can do it for you. It is personal, and it is voluntary that you present your body as a living sacrifice.

B. **The Sacrifice Is to be Slain**

Now, what was a sacrifice? A sacrifice was something that was slain; and yet, you are to be a living sacrifice. How can you be a living sacrifice? It means that though you live, you take death to self, and you say, “Lord Jesus, You're going to come before my wife. You're going to come before my children. You're going to come before my home. You're going to come before my ambition. You're going to come before my education. You're going to come before my business. You're going to come before my pleasure. You are coming into my life. I am crucified with Christ. I am a living sacrifice.” I often hear people say, “Well, make the Lord your partner.” Well, I know what they mean by that, but, my dear friend, He's not your partner, in the strictest sense. He is your master; He is your Lord. And, you are to be a sacrifice, and it is all to be given to Him.

C. **The Sacrifice Is to be Whole**

Not only is that sacrifice to be presented, not only is it to be slain—but it is to be a whole sacrifice. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy”* (Romans 12:1). That means “completely, totally, no part left out, and nothing held back.”

One of the greatest Christians who ever lived was William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army. Wilber Chapman, who was an evangelist, asked William Booth when he was an old man, “General Booth, what has been the secret of your life? Why has God used you so?” The old general brushed a tear out of his eye, bowed his head, and thought a moment. He said this: “God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains, greater opportunities than I, but from the day I had a vision of what God could do with poor ole’ Londoner, I made up my mind that God would have all there is of William Booth.”

Oh, my brothers and sisters, I ask myself that before you and knowing that God is seeing my heart: “Adrian, does God have all there is of you?” The very thought of that is a challenge to my heart, and it strikes fear to my heart that I may be a hypocrite. And oh, before God and before you, I want God to have all there is of me. And, I want God to have all there is of you. For the Bible says if I would turn thanksgiving into “thanks-living,” I would offer spiritual sacrifices. And, to begin with, there is the sacrifice of my person. My self I give to the Lord.

II. **Offer the Sacrifice of Your Praise**

The second sacrifice I want to mention—not only the sacrifice of my person, but the sacrifice of my praise. Why all of this music? Why all of these choirs? Why all these musicians? Why does this church put such an emphasis upon praise? Why these banners with bells and the names of Jesus? The Bible teaches that *“bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”* (Zechariah 14:20). And, banners are a picture of our Lord. The Bible speaks of “when the enemy shall come in like a flood, then shall the Lord lift up a banner against him” (Isaiah 59:19). *“The name of our LORD is a strong [banner]”* (Proverbs 18:10). That’s why—because these things are our ways of praising the Lord.

Now, let me give you the verse—Hebrews chapter 13, verse 15: the Bible says, *“By him”—that is, “By Jesus”—“therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Hebrews 13:15). First of all, our bodies, and now the sacrifice of praise—that is, *“the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”* (Hebrews 13:15).

Now, this morning we had a Love Offering, and I thank God for that mighty offering. All of the results are not yet in, but it has been a wonderful and a glorious offering. But,

you listen to what your pastor has to say tonight: your praise is more valuable to God than the money that you put in that basket this morning. Let me give you a verse of Scripture—Psalm 69, verses 30–31: *“I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving”*—that’s what the choir is doing tonight. And then, the Bible says—*“This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs”* (Psalm 69:30–31). God says, “The songs that you sing tonight are more pleasing to Me than the money brought this morning.”

Now, listen very carefully: your praise is worth more than your money, but your praise is not a substitute for your money, and your praise is vain and empty if you are unwilling to give your money. But, still having given your money, your praise means more to God. And, the Bible says, *“[They] please the LORD better than an ox or a bullock that hath horns or hoofs”* (Psalm 69:31). Again, Psalm 107, verse 22: *“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing”* (Psalm 107:22). Psalm 119, verse 108: *“Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments”* (Psalm 119:108). You want to offer thanks to God? Let it be praise.

A. Praise Must Come of Free Will

Now, this verse says it must be free will. Do you know one of the things that breaks my heart? That you have to plead with some people to praise the Lord. I see some of you sit in here as stoic as you can be. There will be songs of praise, and you sit there like a cigar store Indian. “Make me smile, if you can. Make me sing, if you can. But, you can’t. I’m not going to worship. I’m not going to praise, and I’m not going to sing.” I want to ask you, why not, if Jesus died for you? Why not, if Jesus is Lord? I believe it is a sin before God to sit in a service like this and not praise the Lord. You sin against God. When the song service is going on, you sing. And, if you can’t sing, you *“make a joyful noise unto the LORD”* (Psalm 98:4; Psalm 100:1). My dear friend, it is praise unto our God. It gives God glory. Psalm 119:108: *“Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD.”* And, it must be free will. If it must be begged or coerced, then it’s not praise.

B. Praise Must be Continual

And, it is to be continual. It is to be a way of life. That’s the way, my dear friend, that you turn thanksgiving into “thanks-living.” You say, “I don’t have anything to praise God for.” Well, my dear friend, open your Bible, and open your eyes, and open your heart—and you will have something to praise God for. You look out in your backyard—you’ll find beauty in your backyard. Look into the face of a child, and you’ll find beauty in the face of a child. Open the Word of God, and read the Word of God—and you’ll find plenty to praise the Lord for. And, by the way, dear friend, when you pray, if you get tired and say, “I’ve run out of things to pray for,” begin to praise God. You’ll have an ocean to

swim in.

C. Praise Must be Brought to Church

And, let me say something else: you don't go to church to praise God; you are to bring the praise with you when you come to church. Do you understand what I'm saying? Don't get the idea that the praise begins when you get here. Bring it with you. The Bible says we "*bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD*" (Jeremiah 33:11). Bring that praise with you; have that heart so full of Jesus.

III. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Prayers

Now, you may offer your person to the Lord; that's one sacrifice. You may offer your praise to the Lord; that's another sacrifice. Let me give you the third of these five sacrifices: you may offer your prayers to the Lord as a sacrifice. Put this verse down—Psalm 141, verse 2: "*Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*" (Psalm 141:2). God says that your prayer and the lifting of your hands to God is like a sacrifice; it's like incense that goes up to the Lord.

Now, what's he talking about here? Well, he's saying here, "*Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense*" (Psalm 141:2). If you were to go into the tabernacle in the Old Testament, first of all, as you went in to the tabernacle, you would come past a brazen altar. And, that's where the bloody sacrifice was made. And then, as you walked into the tabernacle, on one side would be the candelabra; on the other side would be the table of showbread. The candelabra speaks of Christ, our sight. The showbread speaks of Christ, our sustenance. The brazen altar speaks of Christ, our sacrifice. And then, you come to that golden altar, the altar of incense, and that speaks of Christ, our supplication. And, the priest would come, first of all, by the way of the blood, and the way of sustenance and sight, to that golden altar. And, there he would burn incense on that golden altar. In the morning, when he came in to trim the lamps, and in the nighttime, when he came in to trim the lamps, he would offer sacrifice upon that golden altar. And, when he would offer sacrifice or incense, it would just ascend up out of the tabernacle, and it would be a sweet-smelling savor, a sacrifice to God—the sacrifice of prayer. Now, God says that your prayers are like that sacrifice.

Now, I want you to listen very carefully: in order to get to the golden altar, you had to come past the brazen altar. The brazen altar is where the blood was; the golden altar is where the incense is. And, nobody can offer incense until he first came by the brazen altar. For the Bible says, "*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (Hebrews 10:19). When you come to our Lord to praise Him, you must come on the basis of the blood atonement. And, may I tell you that the fire that

was in that incense—that altar of incense—that fire had to come, the Bible tells us, from the brazen altar. And, you took the fire from the brazen altar, and dear friend, you burn the incense with the fire from the brazen altar. And, if you put any strange fire there—not fire from the altar, any other kind of fire—it was an abomination to God.

And, I'm telling you, there's only one way to come to God, and it's the blood sprinkled way. There's only one way to pray: it's the blood of Jesus Christ. There must be fire in that altar, and it must be fire from this altar, the brazen altar. But, when there is fire on the golden altar, that altar of incense, on the basis of blood, then, dear friend, there's a sweet perfume that goes up to God.

Would you like to bless God this Thanksgiving season and the rest of your life? Then, there's the sacrifice of your person: "Here, Lord, I give my self away." There's the sacrifice of your praise; continually, you're praising the Lord: "God, You're so great. Lord Jesus, I love You. Hallelujah! Praise Your name." And, there's that offer—that incense—of prayer. Morning and evening, morning and evening, morning and evening, that sweet incense is rising up unto our Lord.

IV. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Possessions

Now, next of all, fourthly, there's the sacrifice of our possessions—the sacrifice of our possessions. Let me give you the verse—Hebrews chapter 13, verse 16: the Bible says, *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16). Or, let me read it to you: *"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"* (Hebrews 13:16).

Now, what does he mean here—"to communicate?" The word—it's an Old English word; it means, actually, "to give to those in need"—just like you did this morning when you brought your gifts to the Lord. Now, you cannot purchase a blessing from God. But, dear friend, when you have material goods and you give them to God, God calls that a "spiritual sacrifice." Giving is an act of worship. Never get up and leave the service after the sermon and before the offering unless you are sick or unless there's a dire emergency. You're walking out on God. Bring your offering to God. Come into the house of the Lord with an offering.

Let your boys and girls, when the offering is taken, have an offering to put in the plate. And, don't simply give them some money to put in there; give them their allowance, and let them take from their allowance, a portion of their own money. And, when they come into church, you teach them to bring an offering, just as they sing and just as they pray. Let them make their offering unto the Lord. It is an act of worship.

And, let it be free will. Around here, we don't twist people's arms to give. We don't browbeat people to give. I said this morning, and I'll say it again tonight: *what you do not willingly give, God neither needs nor wants*. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians

chapter 9, verse 7: *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

I wonder, when you gave your Love Offering today, was that an act of thanksgiving? I mean, did it honor the Lord? After Joyce and I prayed about our gift, very frankly, we could have given more. And, very frankly, we could have given much less. But, when we prayed about it, we said, “Lord, that’s what You want us to give.” And, we felt like it honored God.

You know, Malachi 1, verse 8 says, *“And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 1:8). Sunday by Sunday, people bring gifts that they would be embarrassed to give to their family or friends at a birthday or Christmas; and yet, they bring it to God. They’re not making a sacrifice to God; they are just simply giving God the cast off, the leftover, after they’ve given to everyone else. And, sometimes our giving is an insult to God. My dear friend, bring your gift to the house of God that honors God.

V. Offer the Sacrifice of Your Purity

Now, here’s the last sacrifice: not only the sacrifice of our possessions, but if you would turn thanksgiving into “thanks-living,” let me mention one more time where the Bible mentions a spiritual sacrifice—and it’s found in Psalm 51, verse 17: the Bible says, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Psalm 51:17). Have you given that to God—a broken spirit? Sometimes we sit in church so heady, so haughty, and so unbroken. Oh, my dear friend, when we look at our world around us, when we see a world that’s marching to Hell, when we see our friends and neighbors without Christ, when we realize the coldness and the ingratitude in our own heart, it ought to break our own hearts. Do the things that break the heart of Jesus break your heart? The Bible says it very clearly: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite [spirit]...thou wilt not despise [O God]”* (Psalm 51:17). Let that be true about me. O God, may that be true about our people!

Isaiah 66, verses 1 and 2: *“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine handmade, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isaiah 66:1–2). I just want to call this “the sacrifice of our purity,” when we come with repentance, and faith, and a broken heart, and turn from any thing that’s not like the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion

Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Let me just go over this with you just one more time. While heads are bowed, would you say, “Lord, I’m going to offer that one—first of all, the sacrifice of our bodies, a living sacrifice. Lord, I take hands off of this very body that I have; I give it to You, Lord. I recognize it as a temple of the Holy Spirit. And then, Lord Jesus, I purpose in my heart to offer to You the sacrifice of praise. Lord, out of my heart and from my lips will go the sacrifice of praise. And Lord, morning and evening, the sacrifice of prayer like incense will go up to You. O Lord, the sacrifice of my possessions—Lord God, everything that I have, all of my so-called ‘possessions’—I yield to You. Allow me to use what I need, Lord, but it is all Yours for Your glory and Your praise. And, last of all, dear God, just the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite spirit... Lord, forgive my haughtiness; forgive my self-will. Lord, I offer to You, tonight, a broken spirit”?

Father God, hear this prayer. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen and amen.

How to Live Twenty-Four Hours a Day

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 28, 1980

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 118:24

“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”
PSALMS 118:24

Outline

Introduction

I. A Provided Day

II. A Present Day

A. We Should Refuse to Live in Yesterday

1. Paul Forgot Past Guilt

2. Paul Forgot Past Glory

3. Paul Forgot Past Grief

4. Paul Forgot Past Grudges

B. We Should Refuse to Live in Tomorrow

III. A Precious Day

A. Begin the Day Alone with God

B. Set Your Priorities

C. Live This Day in the Power of the Holy Spirit

D. Realize and Recognize that Procrastination is a Sin

IV. A Passing Day

V. A Providential Day

Conclusion

Introduction

I want you to turn now to Psalm 118 and verse 24—Psalm 118 and verse 24—a very marvelous verse, a verse worth putting to memory—Psalms 118, verse 24. Remember that we’re talking on this subject: “How to Live Twenty-Four Hours a Day.” This verse says, *“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) Listen to it again: *“This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) We face a new year, but we’re not going to live it a year at a time; we’re going to live it a day at a time. And, the Bible teaches us to live day by day, and I’m going to tell you today from the Word of God how to make

every day a good day in 1981. I'm going to tell you how to take every day and live twenty-four hours a day to the maximum so that you might receive the maximum. I believe that our verse is telling us that when we allow a God-given day to be a God-governed day, then it will be a God-gladdened day. *"This is the day which the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it."* (Psalms 118:24) So, I want you to notice five thoughts with me this morning, and if we'll take these five thoughts—these five principles about any day, every day, each day—and apply them, I believe that every day can be a wonderful day and we can truly live, not merely exist, twenty-four hours a day.

I. A Provided Day

The first thought is this: that we need to see that every day next year is a provided day—a provided day. *"This is [a] day which the LORD hath made."* (Psalms 118:24) Or, if you'd rather use the word "a prepared day," a day that God has given us. God has provided this day. We need to see our days as gifts from God. Every day God gives us a brand-new day, and it is a gift. This day right now is a gift for you. God made this day, and that tells us that God is the creator of time. And, God has given you, today, time to live, time to love, time to learn, time to laugh, time to work, time to pray, time to share. God has given you time. But, like any gift—the gifts you got for Christmas—it's up to you how you use it. The gift is a gift from God.

Sometimes when a Christian dies or someone else dies, we say, "God took his life," but that's not so. God doesn't have to take your life in order for you to die; all God has to do is stop giving it. You see, the way that you exist every day is that God just gives you another day. I was studying and thinking about this in the book of Lamentations, a beautiful verse. Put it down in the margin: Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22 and 23. And, listen to what it says, and you'll understand why I say God doesn't have to take your life; all He has to do is stop giving it. The Bible says, *"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."* (Lamentations 3:22–23) Every morning God gives us a brand-new day, and rather than waking up and turning over and looking at the alarm clock and saying, "Good Lord, it's morning," we ought to say, "Good morning, Lord. Thank you for this brand-new, glorious, wonderful day that you've given me." *"This is a day which the LORD hath made."* (Psalms 118:24) It is, dear friend, a day that God has provided for us, and, therefore, we ought to take it as a gift from God and realize that we have a tremendous responsibility not for just any day but for this particular day. Someone wrote these words:

*I have only just a minute,
Only sixty seconds in it
Forced upon me, can't refuse it,...*

*It's up to me [just how I] use it.
I must suffer if I lose it
Give account if I abuse it
Just a tiny little minute
But...eternity is in it.*
— DR. BENJAMIN MAYS

And so, we need to understand that God has given us this day, and God has given us all the same amount of time today.

Now, some of you have more money than some of the others. Some have more strength than some of the others. But, isn't it wonderful that God gave to every one of us today twenty-four hours? And, God gave to every one of us today one thousand four hundred and forty minutes. And, God gave to every one to us today eighty-six thousand seconds. We all have the same amount of time. God gave it; God prepared it. And, time is the gift of God. So, the first thing I want you to see is that the day that you hold in your hands today is a day that God has provided for you. It is a provided day. *"This is [a] day which the LORD hath made."* (Psalms 118:24) See it as a gift from God. Thank Him for it. And, realize that one day you will give an account for this day. One day you're going to have to account for this day.

II. A Present Day

Now, the second thing I want you to see about it: not only is it a provided day, but our text also tells us it is a present day. Notice what it says: *"This is the day"*—not "will be the day," not "was the day," but—*"This is the day..."* (Psalms 118:24) Do you know the failure with most Christians? They fail to live today because they're either worrying about tomorrow or regretting yesterday, and they fail to live today. And, there are two days that will take the joy out of today; there are two days that will take the strength out of today: one is yesterday, and the other is tomorrow.

A. We Should Refuse to Live in Yesterday

We ought to refuse to live in yesterday. Do you know what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians, the third chapter? He said in verse 13: *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind."* (Philippians 3:13) Have you done that? Have you forgotten the past? Paul refused to live in the past.

1. Paul Forgot Past Guilt

He refused to live in past guilt. You see, Paul had been a great sinner. As a matter of fact, he describes himself as the chiefest of sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15) Paul was highly aware of his sin. Do you know what Paul did? Paul helped murder one of the greatest

Christians who ever lived. Paul was an accomplice to the crime of the murder of Saint Stephen, the man whose face shone like an angel. But, I'm so glad that Paul could forget that, because he confessed it to God. He put it in the grave of God's forgetfulness. God forgave him, and God cleansed him. And, the Bible says, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 103:12) The Bible says He's *"cast [our] sins behind [His] back."* (Isaiah 38:17) The Bible says, *"[He] will remember [them against us] no more."* (Jeremiah 31:34) And, my dear friend, if God has forgotten, don't you think you ought to? Paul refused to be haunted by the ghost of guilt. He said, *"I [forget] those things which are behind."* (Philippians 3:13)

2. Paul Forgot Past Glory

But, not only did he forget past guilt, he also forgot past glory, because Paul also had been quite an achiever since he came to the Lord. He was the greatest apostle. He was the greatest missionary. He was the greatest theologian. He was the greatest church planter and the greatest church builder. But, Paul didn't sit around and bask in the sunlight of past accomplishments. He said, *"I [forget] those things which are behind."* (Philippians 3:13)

When I played football, our football coach used to say to us, "Now boys, put up your press clippings. This other team hasn't read them." Now, what he meant was this: "We're going to play this game today. I don't care what you've done."

I don't care how many people you've brought to Jesus yesterday. I don't care how much money you gave yesterday. I don't care about your prayer life yesterday. *"This is [a] day [that] the LORD hath made."* (Psalms 118:24) Paul refused to live in past guilt. He refused to live in past glory.

3. Paul Forgot Past Grief

He refused to live in past grief. He had suffered—I mean, he had really suffered. Listen, this man had been beaten. This man had been stoned. This man had been pickled in the Mediterranean. This man had fought with wild beasts. He had been lied on, and he had been abused, and he'd suffered in jails and prisons. He knew what it was, but he refused to sit around and lick his wounds and feel sorry for himself. He would not live in past grief.

4. Paul Forgot Past Grudges

And, again, he would not live with past grudges. The people had done Paul dirty, and he says he was *"in perils of...[his] countrymen...[and] perils [of his] brethren."* (2 Corinthians 11:26) People lied about him, cheated him, connived against him. Some preached Christ, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. But, Paul refused to carry a grudge; Paul refused to let today be diminished by some grudge of yesterday. He said, "I will not do it"—*"I [forget] those things which are behind."* (Philippians 3:13) Have you

forgotten those things which are behind? I want you to unhook yourself from yesterday, if you would live today. *“This is [a] day which the LORD hath made.”* (Psalms 118:24)

B. **We Should Refuse to Live in Tomorrow**

And then, also, we need not to try to live today by thinking about tomorrow. Do you know what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, verse 34? Jesus said, *“Take...no thought for the morrow...the morrow [will] take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”* (Matthew 6:34) Now, some of you are ruining today by worrying about tomorrow. And, I want to tell you something—I hope it won’t hurt your feelings: worry is a great sin. Jesus said it is acting like a heathen; it’s acting like a pagan. (Matthew 6:32) Jesus said, *“This is the way the pagans act. They act as though God is dead.”* (Matthew 6:32)

You say, “Well, dear friend, if I don’t worry about tomorrow, who’s going to worry about tomorrow?” Don’t worry about it—don’t worry about it. *“The morrow [will] take thought [of] the things of itself.”* (Matthew 6:34) You see, when you worry about tomorrow, that doesn’t get you ready for tomorrow. All your worrying about tomorrow does is take your strength today by fighting imaginary foes. And then, when tomorrow gets here, you don’t have any strength to fight tomorrow’s battles because you used up your strength today fighting imaginary foes. When you get to tomorrow, then you have strength for tomorrow. You see, God, in His infinite wisdom, has seen to it that you’ll have some trouble today. When I say, *“This is [a] day...the LORD [has] made,”* (Psalms 118:24) I don’t mean that He made a day without any trouble. God will see to it that you have trouble. He wants you to have trouble. You say, “Why?” So you’ll feel your need of Him—so that you’ll have to depend upon Him.

Now, notice how beautiful it is: *“Take...no thought for the morrow...the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”* (Matthew 6:34) What does that mean? Every day we have a certain amount of evil. Now, that doesn’t mean sin; it means a certain amount of adversity, a certain amount of pain, and problems, and vicissitudes. Every day we have a certain amount, but there is a sufficiency today to meet today’s needs. God gives, every day, strength for every day’s needs. But, you cannot, dear friend, try to apply today’s strength to tomorrow’s needs. It doesn’t work that way. The Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 33 and verse 25: *“As thy days [are]”—listen to it now—“as thy days [are], so shall thy strength be.”* (Deuteronomy 33:25) God gives strength for today. And, worry does not take the sorrow out of tomorrow; all it does is take the strength out of today. Listen to me: you’re not going to change the morrow; *“the morrow [will] take thought [of] the things of itself.”* (Matthew 6:34) When tomorrow gets here and tomorrow’s problems are here, tomorrow’s strength will be here. Today is here. Today’s joys are here. Today’s problems are here. Today’s

strength is here. *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) It is a present day.

And, you know, not only do we need to get out of the habit of worrying about tomorrow, but we need to get out of the habit of anticipating the joys of tomorrow. Now, there’s nothing wrong with a certain amount of anticipation. But, psychologist William Marston surveyed three thousand persons, and he found out, of those three thousand persons—he asked them what they were living for...a question similar to that—and of these, ninety-four percent of them said they were enduring today—enduring today—and living for tomorrow. Now, you think about that: enduring today, trying to get to tomorrow, always thinking that joy is out there. But, you know, the sad thing about it is tomorrow never comes. God wants you to enjoy today. You are to enjoy today, not endure today and wait for tomorrow, ’cause tomorrow never gets here today. Friend, if you’re going to be happy, you better get at it. If you’re going to start enjoying life, I want you to start right now. As a matter of fact, I’m going to enjoy preaching this sermon. I hope you’ll enjoy listening to it. I mean, right now! *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) Quit trying to live in the future tense. Tomorrow is a time nowhere except on the fool’s calendar. Yesterday is gone in the grave of God’s forgetfulness. We live, as Christians, in the great eternal now. And, squeeze all of the juice out of this day that you can squeeze, because this is the only day that you have. The Bible says, *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”* (Proverbs 27:1) Do you understand what we’re saying? We’re saying, dear friend, that this day is a provided day. God made it. And, this is the day—God gives us this day as a present day.

Now, so many mothers... You know, a mother—she spends twenty years anticipating having children. Then, she has them, spends twenty years with them (approximately), and then she spends twenty years remembering that she had them and thinking about them. And, I’ve noticed that so many women look forward twenty years to becoming a mother, look twenty years back with memories, but they complain the twenty years they have them. Why don’t you just enjoy them now? And, just say, *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made”* (Psalms 118:24)—“I’m going to enjoy these children while I have them.”

III. A Precious Day

All right. Now, the third thing I want you to see: not only, if you would make every day a wonderful day and if you would live twenty-four hours a day, not only do you need to see that every day is a provided day—that God made it; God gave it; therefore, you’re a steward of it—and not only that every day is a present day—that it must be lived in the now; it cannot be lived yesterday; it cannot be lived tomorrow—but the third thing I want

you to learn is that every day, therefore, is a precious day—a precious day. Oh, how we need to learn to value time, because *“this is [a] day [that] the LORD hath made.”* (Psalms 118:24) Time is the stuff that life is made out of.

And, anything that kind of hacks me off is to hear a person say he’s “killing time,” because you’re not killing time—you can’t kill time—what you’re doing is killing you. You see, what happens... Killing time—what some people call “killing time”—is suicide by degrees. Do you know what murder is? “Well,” you say, “murder is taking someone’s life.” In a sense, it is. But, you see, everybody’s going to die anyway. What murder is is taking someone’s time; it’s causing them to die sooner than they would have died, you see. You see, time is the stuff that life is made out of, and we need to understand how important—how valuable—this thing of time is.

When you give me your time, when you sit down and give me fifteen minutes of your time, twenty minutes of your time, an hour of your time, you are giving to me a gift that even heaven cannot give. You know, when we get to heaven, someone says, “Can I have an hour of your time?” you say, “Sure, what difference does it make?” Now, you don’t have any less left after you get over it, do you? I mean, you know, you can’t... You’ve got all eternity. It’s only here that we can give time. Did you know in a sense that we can give to one another things that even God cannot give to us? When I give you my time, God can’t really give you His time, ’cause God doesn’t have any. All He’s got is eternity. I mean, if God gives me an hour, He’s still got just as much left, amen? You see, but when I give you time, I have given you a portion of my very life, if we understand just how valuable this thing called time is.

And, the art of living is really being able to spend time wisely. That’s the reason the Bible says in Psalms chapter 90 and verse 12: *“[O Lord,] teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”* (Psalms 90:12) And, I got to thinking about that as I was preparing this sermon. I said, “How do you apply your heart unto wisdom? How do you learn—if every day is so precious—how do you learn how to spend it?” And, let me tell you some of my New Year’s resolutions, okay? You know, resolutions go in one year and out the other. All right, now, let me tell you my New Year’s resolutions—how to live twenty-four hours a day.

A. Begin the Day Alone with God

Number one: If you would do this—realize the preciousness of the day—you must begin the day alone with God. You must—you must, you must—spend enough time with God to get a clear sense of His direction. I appreciated Brother Whitmire saying, “I am going to spend more time with God to get a sense of the direction of God.” You do not waste time when you wait on God. You see, the important thing is to find out what God wants you to do, not what duties you have impressed upon yourself or other people have

imposed upon you. One of the things that I have learned and I need to keep relearning is this: that there is enough time in every day to do gracefully everything God wants you to do. Now, please let that sink in. Don't ever, ever say, "I need to do thus-and-such, but I don't have time." That's a lie. There's nothing that you need to do that you don't have time to do—nothing that you need to do that you don't have time to do. *There is enough time in every day to do gracefully everything that God wants you to do*, or God is a tyrant who doesn't deserve to be served. God made this day, and God knows what He wants you to do in this day. And, if God made this day and God knows what He wants you to do in this day, then it is incumbent upon you to get alone with God, listen to God, and let God speak to you.

B. Set Your Priorities

And then, secondly, after you've been alone with God and let God speak to you and God tell you what He wants you to do, then you set your priorities—then you set your priorities. You see, the difficulty in life is not the choice between good and bad. If that were the choice, it'd be relatively simple. The difficulty in life is the choice between good and best—good and best. You see, most of us fail not because we're doing wrong things or bad things, may I say, but we're not doing the best things. And so, we need to get things more prioritized.

Now, most of us, when we talk about time, we want to be more efficient, you know. And, most people, when they read books on time, they read books on efficiency like, for example, speed-reading. Wouldn't you like to be able to speed-read? I'll tell you what I want: I want something where I can just put a book up there and go zap like that and just go right in. I won't even have to read it. Wouldn't that be wonderful? And, you get it just like that. Most of us really—we read about a couple of hundred words a minute. How would you like to learn how to read fifty thousand words a minute? I'm going to tell you how you can do the equivalent of that—fifty thousand words a minute. Are you ready? Just find a fifty-thousand-word book that you don't need to read and don't read it. Isn't that neat? Or, now look—just don't read it. Look how much time you saved! Now, what I'm trying to say is that the *what* is more important than the *how*—what you do. Dear friend, what we need is not necessarily more efficiency; we need more effectiveness to, see, to get things prioritized. We can't do everything.

But, you think of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus came to the end of His ministry, Jesus was able to say to God the Father, "*I have finished the work...thou gavest me to do.*" (John 17:4) Thirty-three years, and He did it all. Jesus was never in a hurry, and Jesus was never late, because, you see, Jesus had a sense of the Father's will: "*I do always those things that please him.*" (John 8:29) And, you see, success is just the progressive realization of the will of God in your life. So, we need, number one, if we

would make this day a precious day and squeeze all of the juice we can out of it, number one, we have to start listening to God and letting God speak to us. Number two: Therefore, we, in the light of what God says, we prioritize our lives, and we put some things in and take other things out.

C. **Live This Day in the Power of the Holy Spirit**

And then, thirdly, we then live this day in the power of the Holy Spirit. You know, the Bible says that we are to “[redeem] the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:16) That’s in Romans 5, I think, verses 14 and 15: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:16) And then—excuse me, Ephesians 5—and then, in Ephesians verse 18—5:18: the Bible says, “Be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18) Now, notice—first, the command is to use your time wisely; and then, right on the heels of that is to be filled with the Spirit. Now, that tells us that if we’re going to use our time wisely, we need to be filled with the Spirit. You see, when I, you know—when most of us—rebel against using our time wisely, you know what we do? We think that means work ourselves to death. That isn’t what it means. As a matter of fact, if you use your time wisely, you may not work nearly as hard. I’m not talking to you about working harder; I’m talking to you about working better and more effectively. I might be talking to you about slowing down a little bit. I believe, if there’s an eleventh commandment, it ought to be, “Thou shalt not sweat it.”

So many times we’re running around here in a fever, knocking things over. You know, we have a Christmas lamp. It’s one of these oil lamps that people used to light their house with. We just use it for decoration. It has a wick, and the wick goes down into the oil base. And, the wick stays there soaked, immersed in the oil. And, when you light the lamp, it burns brightly. And, it’s really not the wick that is burning; it’s the oil that’s burning. But, if that lamp were to give out of oil and we lit the wick, then the wick would burn up right away, and it would make a lot of smoke and leave a pile of ashes. That’s what most of us do: we smoke up the chimney; we don’t give a very bright light. And, our difficulty is we’re burning the wick rather than the oil. The oil is the Holy Spirit of God. You see, we need to be saturated in Him and just rest in Him and burn that oil—the holy oil of God—and we’ll continue to be that burning and that shining light. I’m not telling you, dear friend, necessarily to work harder, but to work better. I’m not speaking to you about a more tightly wound life; I’m talking to you about an effective life—spending time with God, finding out what God wants you to do; and then, prioritizing your life so that the good does not steal the best; and then, living that life in the power of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

D. **Realize and Recognize that Procrastination is a Sin**

And, the fourth thing: If you would make this day a precious day and maximize this day,

realize and recognize that what we call “procrastination” is really sin. And, that’s the one that really grips me now. I’m really preaching to me right now. What we call “procrastination” is really sin. I want to give you a verse on that—James 4:17: *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is [procrastination].”* Is that what it says? *“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is”—*you finish it—*“sin.”* (James 4:17) Hard to say it, isn’t it? All right, now look: *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* (James 4:17) Do you know what obedience is? It is instant or it is not truly obedience. We need to learn to instantly obey. You see, if we do not obey instantly, if we do not obey immediately, we really do not obey at all. When God tells us to do something—the moment God’s Holy Spirit says, “Do it”—we need to do it. So, I want to recognize, in my life, procrastination is a sin and to repent of it.

Now, I’ve tried to say three things to make every day a wonderful day and a successful day. We need to realize, first of all, it is a provided day: it is a day that God has made; therefore, we should thank Him for it and be stewards over it. Secondly, we should realize that this day is a present day: we should live it now, not regretting the past or anticipating the future. Thirdly, we should realize, because it is a God-given day, it is a precious day. It is the stuff that life is made out of it. And, we should get our lives so prioritized and so filled with the Holy Spirit that we live the day that God has given in the power that God gives when He gives us the day.

IV. A Passing Day

Now, the fourth thing I want you to notice: Not only is it a precious day; it is also a passing day—a passing day. This day is passing away. Every day passes away. That’s the reason the Lord Jesus Christ said in the ninth chapter of John and the fourth verse: *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: [for] the night cometh, when no man can work.”* (John 9:4) This day is fast passing away. What you intend to do for God you’d better get with it.

Let me tell you some things that you cannot do with time. You cannot save it. Now, every now and then somebody will give you a remedy for saving time, but let me tell you, they’re a shyster if they give you a remedy for saving time. You can’t save time. Nobody can save time. You cannot save time. You cannot borrow time. You cannot loan time. You cannot leave time. You can not take time. There are only two things you can do with time: you can use it or lose it—that’s all. You see, this day is passing away. Time can’t be stopped. If you’re playing basketball or football, you can call, “Timeout,” but you can’t call, “Timeout” in life. Time can’t be stopped. Time can’t be stored: you can’t put time in the bank like you put money in the bank. Time can’t be stretched: you can’t add another cup of water to the soup. Time can’t be stretched, and time can’t be

shared: I can't give you mine, and you can't give me yours, in that sense. Now, I can give you some of my time in the sense that I share myself with you, but I can't really give you time. I can't take time from my life and add it to your life. It cannot be shared. It cannot be borrowed. It cannot be loaned. Time is passing, passing, passing. Every second is so valuable.

*When as a child I laughed and wept,
Time crept.
When as a youth I dreamed and talked,
Time walked.
When I became a full-grown man,
Time ran.
When older still I daily grew,
Time flew.
Soon I shall find, in passing on,
Time gone.*

—HENRY TWELLS

You see, time is leaving us. This day is a passing day. And, whatever you intend to do for God—you'd better do it. You intend to be a tither? You'd better start. You intend to be a prayer warrior? You'd better start. You intend to be soul winner? You'd better start. You intend to share more time with your children? You'd better start. You intend to write your mother a letter? You'd better do it today. You intend to do something sweet? Don't wait 'til the funeral; it'll be too late. Oh, we go out and buy these beautiful floral offerings. They have their place, but it has well been said, "Dead noses smell no roses." This day is passing away. What you intend to do for God—you'd better do it. Friend, I am saying this is a passing day. Someone put an ad out like this: "Lost: One golden hour studded by sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for it is gone forever."

A lady wrote Ann Landers. She said to Ann Landers, "Dear Ann, I'm thirty-six years old, and I've only gotten my high school diploma. And, everybody's encouraging me to go back to college and finish my college work. But," she said, "I got to thinking about it: If I went back to college, that would take four years. By the time I got out of college, I would be forty years old. What should I do?" Ann wrote her back and said, "How old would you be if you didn't go to college four years from now?"

Now, you think about it. Look, friend, whatever you're going to do, whenever you're going to do it, you might as well get started, 'cause you're not getting any younger. Time is passing. This is a passing day.

And, as a matter of fact, it is the only day that you have. Robert Moffat, who was a pioneer missionary, said this: "We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories but only one short hour before the sunset in which to win them"—"all eternity to

celebrate our victories but only a short hour before the sunset in which to win them.” What is the Bible saying? Our days are like the weaver’s shuttle. (Job 7:6) Our days are passing. Our days are but a moment. Our days are but a shadow. Time is passing. Do you realize that? Maximize today. It is a passing day. Don’t lose it. Seize on it. Use it for the glory of God, I challenge you. What thing is it now that the Holy Spirit is pressing upon your heart that you need to do? What is that golden dream that God has put within your bosom? Get at it! *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) It, dear friend, is a provided day. It, dear friend, is a day that is a precious day. It, dear friend, is a present day. It is a passing day.

V. A Providential Day

Let me say, finally, it is a providential day—a providential day. Now, what do I mean by that? It is a day that has come from the hand of God. And, therefore, everything that happens to me in this day is by the providence of God—by the providence of God. Have you ever wondered how the psalmist could say, *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”*? (Psalms 118:24) Because we know that many times sorrows come our way, and I’m trying to say how to have three hundred and sixty-five wonderful days. The only way that you can have three hundred and sixty-five wonderful days is to see the providence of God in every day—no matter what happens, to see that God’s providence rules over it. The secret of joy is to see the providence of God in everything and rejoice in everything.

You see, happiness, really, is a choice: you can choose to rejoice or you can refuse to rejoice. You can say with the psalmist, *“This is the day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice.”* (Psalms 118:24) And, you don’t rejoice in it because everything happens to come up roses for you; you just rejoice in it because God made it. And, nothing comes to you but what, somehow, He allows it, and it comes through Him first. This is the reason the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 18: *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Did you hear that? *“In every thing give thanks.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) “You mean, when I go to the doctor and get a bad report, give thanks?” Yes! “You mean, when I lose my job, give thanks?” Yes! “You mean, when I have a rebellious son, give thanks?” Yes! “You mean, when my children have forgotten me and I’m alone and no one seems to care, that I am to give thanks?” Yes! You say, “Brother Rogers, I don’t agree with you.” Well, it’s not me that you’re disagreeing with; it’s God. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Listen again to Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 20: *“Giving thanks always for all things...”* (Ephesians 5:20) Ephesians 5:20: *“Giving thanks always for all things...”* Now,

how can you do that? That doesn't mean that everything is good. Things are not necessarily good for you to thank God for them. It just simply means that you take everything in this day that God has given and you write "Romans 8:28" over it all: *"And we know that all things work together for good to [those who] love God...who are the called according to his purpose."* And, if all of these things and God's chemistry of the cross are working together for your good, then, in those things you can thank God by faith, and you can say, "No matter what happens, I will rejoice. I choose to rejoice."

A man came up to a beggar sitting on the street corner, and the man said to the beggar, hoping to make him feel better, "God give you a good day, my friend." The beggar looked up at him and said, "I've never had a bad one." Well, the man said, "Well, then God give you a happy life, my friend." And, the beggar looked up at him and said, "I thank God that I'm never unhappy." The man couldn't understand that, and he said, "What do you mean you're never unhappy?" And, this is what the beggar said: he said, "When the weather is fine and the day is fine, I thank God for it." He says, "When it rains, I thank God for it." He said, "When I have plenty, I thank God for it. And, when I am hungry, I thank God for it. Since God's will is my will, whatever pleases Him pleases me. Why should I say I'm unhappy when I'm not?" And, the man said, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm a king." He said, "Where's your kingdom?" He said, "In my heart." And, he'd learned a secret.

You say, "Well, that's a little fable." Well, let me tell you something: it's not a fable. The Apostle Paul said, *"[I've] learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."* (Philippians 4:11) He said, "I know how to be abased, and how to abound. I know how to be full and to suffer need. I just rejoice always in the Lord." (Philippians 4:12) See, *"this is [a] day"—"this is [a] day"—"the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it."* (Psalms 118:24)

Let me give you the flipside of the story about the beggar. A minister got on a train, and he looked over there—they were riding along—and there was an elegantly dressed man and a woman who was immaculately groomed. Everything was done just right. She had on furs and diamonds dripping from her fingers. But, the man was trying to act fairly nice about the situation, but the woman was carping and complaining about the service and everything. Nothing seemed to suit her. The minister and the man got into a conversation. And, the minister asked the man what his business was, and he told him. And then, he said, "And, what does your wife do?" And, the man said, "My wife is in the manufacturing business." And, he said, "Well, she doesn't look like the executive type. What does she manufacture?" And, the man said, "She manufactures her own unhappiness."

That's up to you, friend—it's up to you. Some of you can sit around today, and I don't care what you have and how many things are going for you—you can take this time and

put it together in such a way as to make yourself unhappy, or you can say in the words of the scripture: *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) *“And we know that all things work together for good to [those who] love God...who are the called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

*We thank Him for sun. Do we thank Him for rain?
We thank Him for joy. Do we thank Him for pain?
We thank Him for gains. Do we thank Him for losses?
We thank Him for blessings. Do we thank Him for crosses?*

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

“In every thing give thanks.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24)

Conclusion

Do you know what I have determined to do, if God will help me this year? I’m not going to live in yesterday, and I’m not going to live in tomorrow. I’m going to enjoy today—I am. I’m going to squeeze every ounce of juice out of today I can. I’m going to say with the psalmist, *“This is [a] day...the LORD hath made; [I] will rejoice and be glad in it.”* (Psalms 118:24) And, I’m going to stop saying, “If I had time, I would do thus-and-such.” I do have time. Have you ever made a mistake, saying, “So-and-so has more time than I have?” The difference between people is not the amount of time they have; it’s how they use it—how they use it. We all have the same amount. I’m going to start trying to prioritize my life according to the will of God. I’m going to enjoy today because it’s God’s day; He gave it to me. And, I’m going to live 1981 one day at a time.

Now, let me just say this word to those of you who may not be saved—you’re not a Christian: I want to urge you to give your heart to Jesus Christ today. There are some who would have been in this service today who will not be here because they died since last Sunday. I always, or frequently, say many times, “I’ve preached the last sermon a person will ever hear.” A little lady sat right over here last Sunday, as far as she knew in perfect health, good health—left this service and died last Sunday. You see, the Bible says, *“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”* (Proverbs 27:1) The Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 2: *“behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* (2 Corinthians 6:2)

If you ever intend to get saved, I want you to do it now. Jesus will save you now. Jesus calls you now. The Bible warns about waiting ’til tomorrow. If tomorrow comes, you only have one less day to repent in and one more day to repent of. You need to come to Jesus now—now. Be saved. If I could give my heart to Jesus Christ for you, I

would. If I could trust Him for you, I would, but I cannot. I've preached as best I know how. But, lest you missed it, let me tell you one more time: God loves you, and He has a wonderful plan for your life. But, sin has separated you from God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered, and bled, and died, and took your sin upon Him, carried your sin to the cross, and paid your sin debt in full. And, you must receive Him as your personal Savior by faith in order for that to be applied to you. The Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" (Acts 16:31) You're not saved by joining a church or getting baptized. You're not saved by good works. You're saved by faith in the Son of God. I want you today to put your faith where God put your sins: on Jesus—on Jesus. And, if you do, God will forgive your sins. Jesus will come into your heart and give you a new nature. One day, perhaps sooner than we realize, He'll take us home to heaven. 1981 may be the year when Jesus comes again. Many of us feel a very real possibility. Are you saved? Do you know Him?

Five Ways to Understand the Bible

By Adrian Rogers

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Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119

"I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies."

PSALMS 119:125

Outline

Introduction

I. Why Should You Understand the Word of God?

- A. The Word of God Is a Source of Truth
- B. The Word of God Is a Source of Gladness
- C. The Word of God Is a Source of Victory
- D. The Word of God Is a Source of Growth
- E. The Word of God Is a Source of Power
- F. The Word of God Is a Source of Guidance
 1. To Be Saved
 2. To Be Sanctified
 3. To Be Spirit-filled

II. How Can You Understand the Word of God?

- A. You Must Pray Over the Word of God
 1. Your Heart Will Be Stirred
 2. Your Mind Will Be Enlightened
- B. You Must Ponder the Word of God
- C. You Must Practice the Word of God
- D. You Must Proclaim What God Gives You
- E. You Must Personalize the Word of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Holy Word and turn to Psalm 119? And, in just a moment, we're going to read verse 125. A dear precious lady, a member of this church, came to me recently. She said, "Pastor, I'm having difficulty living in victory." Well, as a good physician of the soul, I tried to make a diagnosis. And, I said, "Are you having a quiet time with the Lord?" She said, "Well, I try." I said, "Are you into God's Word daily?" She said, "Well Pastor, to be very honest, I don't get much out of the Bible. I read the Bible,

and I try to understand it; but it's not very real to me. What should I do, Pastor?" Well, I want to tell her and you today what to do. I want to give you five ways to better understand your Bible. Look at the prayer; it's a prayer that every servant of God ought to pray—Psalm 119:135: *"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me"—"teach me"—"thy statutes."* And, verse 125: *"I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies"* (Psalm 119:125). Five ways to get understanding—to understand the Word of God:

I. Why Should You Understand the Word of God?

And, why should you understand the Word of God?

A. The Word of God Is a Source of Truth

Well, my dear friend, first of all, you need to understand the Word of God because the Word of God is truth; it is simply truth. And, without the Word of God, you're going to be stumbling in darkness. Pilate asked Jesus, *"What is truth?"* (John 18:38). Ole' cynical Pilate—he'd heard so much. But, Jesus gave that answer when Jesus said in John 17, verse 17: *"[My] word is truth"* (John 17:17). And indeed, the Word of God is truth. Look at Psalm 119:30—Psalm 119 and verse 30—and, by the way, we're going to be all over this psalm, this morning, and so just lick your fingers: *"I have chosen the way of truth"* (Psalm 119:30).

Now, it's so important, friend, that you have something that you can say, "This is absolutely true, impeccably true, inherently true, infallible true, consistently true." *"Thy word is truth"* (John 17:17)—that's what the Lord Jesus said. Did you know that facts may double, knowledge may double, but truth—never. I was interested to note that we are producing, in the United States now—and you'll be interested to learn this—we are producing so many books we're writing 3,000 pages of stuff—publishing 3,000 pages of stuff—every second in the United States. I mean, every second, 3,000 more pages are published. A thousand books are published a day in the United States. And, by the way, I've just written a new book I'd like for you to get and read. Somebody asked a man and said, "Why haven't you written a book yet?" Well, I'd rather have people ask me, "Why I haven't?" than "Why I have." But, I have, and I'd like for you to get that book and read it.

But, you think about it—think of it: a thousand books a day. People are learning all kinds of things. The accumulation of knowledge is phenomenal. If you were to take and put on a graph all of the knowledge from the dawn of history to 1845, we would let that represent on that graph one inch. And then, if you take the knowledge from 1845 to 1945 and put it on that graph, it would jump to three inches. That is, there was a quantum leap from 1845 to 1945. But, if you were to take the knowledge from 1945 to the present time, it would equate a line on that graph longer than the Washington

Monument. You see, Daniel the prophet said, “In the last days, knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4). Oh, he was right. And then, he said, “And men will rush to and fro” (Daniel 12:4). Have you been in an airport lately? Have you seen people going everywhere? And, we have so much knowledge.

Now, they say that before very long, you’ll be able to get a college education without going to college. You can sit in front of your television set and take courses. You can take examinations. You can even ask questions in any field of knowledge just simply by television. You can get whatever you want. And, before long, they say that you’ll be able to talk on the telephone by what they call *picture phone*. Pick up the telephone and talk to someone—and not only will you be able to hear them, you’ll be able to see them. Boy, that’ll do something with deceptive packaging, won’t it? You’ll be able to see people when you talk to them. They’re doing all kinds of things. The dentists tell us now that they can weld new enamel on your teeth, and the physicians say, “Well, if you need a new artery, we’ll just make you a Dacron artery. We’ll be able to put artificial skin on you. We’ll we will be able to give you metallic bones and an artificial heart.” And, they can just fix you up.

As a matter of fact, recently I read where they’re making, now, food that is non-digestible. That is, you can eat it, but you don’t gain weight. You can gorge and be gorgeous. And, that’s what they’re working on. They are working in television what they call *holography*—that is, 360-degree television—not two-dimensional television, but three-dimensional. That is, if there’s a mystery and a man says, “I’ve got a gun behind my back,” and you’re watching television—you just go look and see if he does. You say, “That’s impossible.” No, friend, what is happening is amazing—what is happening.

But, here’s the fact, and I want you to listen to this: with all of this today, we still have more crime, more suicide, more mental illness, more broken homes, more drug abuse, more difficulty, more rot, more war, than ever before. You see, why? Because we’re learning facts, not truth. Do you see the difference? You see, knowledge may double, quadruple, but truth—never. If it’s new, it’s not truth. The Bible says, “*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven*” (Psalm 119:89). There’s only one source of truth, and it is the Word of God. Now listen, folks, those of us who are saved have had this standard of truth, and we have become accustomed to it. Can you imagine what it would be like to live in a world like ours and not really know what truth is? Thank God that the Bible is truth. That’s one reason.

B. The Word of God Is a Source of Gladness

Not only is it a source of truth, however; it’s such a source of gladness. To know this truth gives you joy. Look, if you will, in verse 54 of this same psalm—Psalm 119 and verse 54: “*Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage*” (Psalm

119:54). This is not a law book; it's a songbook. Listen, these rules—these laws—are for your welfare. And, *when God says, "Thou shalt not," He just says, "Don't hurt yourself."* And, *when God says, "Thou shalt," He's saying, "Help yourself to happiness. Here's a way to great joy."* You want joy? You want happiness? You're going to get it from the Word of God. The Lord Jesus said in the New Testament in Luke chapter 11 and verse 28: *"blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"* (Luke 11:28). You want to be blessed? It's a blessing book. The Apostle John said, *"These things write [I] unto you, that your joy may be full"* (1 John 1:4). You're going to find joy not in things and not in knowledge, but in truth, epitomized in the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. **The Word of God Is a Source of Victory**

It's the source of truth; because it's the source of truth, it's the source of joy. And, it's the source of victory. Sing "Victory in Jesus." Look, if you will, in chapter 119 and verse 45 here for just a moment: *"I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts"* (Psalm 119:45). Are you walking in liberty today? Are you in bondage to lust? Are you in bondage to fear? In bondage to covetousness? In bondage to resentment? Or, can you say, today, "Thank God, I am free"? How are you going to walk in liberty? With the Word of God that sets you free from the shackles that Satan would put upon you. The Lord Jesus told us that we were at war with Satan. And, the apostle said, in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 17, in that war, we're to take *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17).

Now, I want to say something about that, dear friend: that doesn't mean the Bible, as such, although the Bible is the Word of God. But, what he says here, when he says, *"Take...the sword of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 6:17), he doesn't use the word for *sword* that means "a great broad sword," but he uses the word that for a *dagger* very much like a dagger that someone would keep inside of his coat. And, if and if ole' Brother Phil were to come over here and pounce me—and he's big enough to pounce me—I'd just reach in, and get a dagger, and fix his wagon. See, I have something hidden in here. Now, I don't really bout. I have something hidden in my heart which is very similar. It is the sword of the Spirit. Now, he uses the word for that very specially, carefully placed dagger. That's what he's talking about—something you put in there just very carefully.

And then, for the word...when he says, "Take the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17), he doesn't use the word *logos*, which speaks more or less of the Bible as a whole, but he uses the word *rhema*, which means "a word from the word." The first Adam in a perfect garden went down because he doubted the Word of God. Satan, in that garden, said, "Hath God said...?" And, he put that doubt in there, and Adam went down. The last Adam—not in a garden, but in the wilderness—overcame the devil. How? With the Word of God. Every time Satan came, Jesus would

say, “It is written... it is written... it is written.” And, three times, with that specially placed dagger, Jesus didn’t just hold the Bible up. But, what Jesus did—He took a word from the Word. I have an idea that Jesus had been doing His devotions those 40 days in the Book of Deuteronomy. Each time, He took a verse out of the Word.

You see, what happens is this: that the devil will find some weak place in your armor because you have not taken the whole counsel of God. But listen—when you walk at liberty... You walk at liberty when you know the Word of God. There is such power there. It, my dear friend, is a source of victory.

D. **The Word of God Is a Source of Growth**

Not only is it a source of victory—it is a source of growth. Look, if you will, in verse 32 of this same chapter: *“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart”* (Psalm 119:32). Are you growing in heart power? Is God enlarging your heart? I know many of you that—I’ve been pastor to now for about fifteen years—that haven’t grown much. At least, I can’t observe it very much. That might say as much about me as it says about you, because I’m your pastor and your shepherd. But, there’s no way that you’re going to grow apart from the Word of God, dear friend.

You want to grow in the Lord and the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? The Bible teaches us in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 2: *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that [you] may grow thereby”* (1 Peter 2:2). We’ve gotten a new grandbaby in our house—at least, in our household. He doesn’t live in our house. Thank God, he just comes to visit. We got a new grandbaby. He’s got a very wonderful name: Adrian Gentry Foster. Now, you have to admit it, that’s a great name for a great kid. But, you know his parents fixed up his room for him to sleep in. He doesn’t care about that wallpaper. He doesn’t care about the shade of the drapes or anything. That’s from Mom and Dad. He’s very single-minded. You know what he wants? Milk—milk. *“As [a] newborn [babe], desire the sincere milk of the word, that [you] may grow thereby”* (1 Peter 2:2). Oh, the desire of your heart ought to be for the Word of God. Job said, *“I have [desired] the words of his mouth more than my necessary [meat]”* (Job 23:12). It’s a means of growth.

Many of you are not growing because about all the milk you get is on Sunday morning. You come get a thimble full and spill it on the way out, and you wonder why you’re not growing? Because you’re not feeding on the Word of God. You see, the Word of God, friend, is a source of truth, it’s a source of joy, it’s a source of victory, it’s a source of growth.

E. **The Word of God Is a Source of Power**

And, I want to tell you, it’s a source of power. Look, if you will, in verse 25: *“My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:25). That is,

“I’m down in the dust. I’m down in the dumps. O God, I’m discouraged. Put some strength in me, according to Thy Word.” Look in verse 28: *“My soul melteth for heaviness”*—I love the Psalms because they tell the truth. David just expresses all the full gamut of human emotion. He said, “I’m just dissolved. I’ve had a problem that’s just dissolved me. My soul melts for heaviness.” Now, notice his prayer; listen to it—*“strengthen thou me according unto thy word”* (Psalm 119:28).

Friend, things are going to get you down unless you get into the Word of God. You see, the New Testament says in Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12: *“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12). That word *quick* means, “it’s alive.” It’s the word *zoon*; it’s the word from which we get *zoology*. It’s alive. And, *energes*—that’s the word we get our word *energy* from. It is full of life and energy; it pulsates. It’s not like any other book. Friend, you read other books; this one reads you. It gets into you, and it gives you power; and it gives you strength. It gives you life. You want that power? Then get in the Word of God.

F. **The Word of God Is a Source of Guidance**

It’s a source of guidance. You and most people—what do you want to know? They say, “I want to know God’s will for my life.” Look in Psalm 119, verse 105, if you will: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105). You see, most of the will of God for your life is already revealed. If you’ll do what God has already revealed, you won’t have much difficulty with the rest of it. The rest of it will be almost automatic.

Let me tell you what God says His will is.

1. **To Be Saved**

For example, He says in the Word of God—we’ll not reference it, but I can give you a reference for each of these: He’s *“not willing that any should perish”* (2 Peter 3:9). God wants you to be saved. That’s God’s will for your life. Are you saved? That’s step number one in God’s will.

2. **To Be Sanctified**

Number two: God wants you to be sanctified. The Bible says, *“This is the will of God, even your sanctification”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Well, you say, “What does that mean?” It means that God wants you to live a clean and pure life.

3. **To Be Spirit-filled**

And then, the will of God is that you be Spirit-filled. The Bible says in Ephesians 5: *“Be...not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is...be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:17–18). Just think of it—salvation, sanctification, Spirit-filled. That’s the will of God.

Now, hey folks, if you're not willing to start there, why worry about the rest of it? As a matter of fact, if you'll just do those three things—salvation, sanctification, and Spirit-fullness—each one of those, He specifically says, is the will of God for you—you're going to find out that you're going to have the mind of Christ; you're going to be like a guided missile, guided by the Holy Spirit of God. And, so many of these other things are just going to be automatics. Where are you going to get the light from that you need? From God's Word. *"The entrance of thy words giveth light"* (Psalm 119:130). God's Word is like a lamp, like a light to your path—*"a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105). So, my dear friend, it's so important that you understand the Word of God.

II. How Can You Understand the Word of God?

Let me give you five principles. Are you ready for them? Five things to help the Word of God to become very real to you—and these are very, very simple and yet very, very profound and very wonderful.

A. You Must Pray Over the Word of God

Principle number one is you must—you must—pray over the Word of God. You must pray over the Word of God. Look, if you will, in Psalm 119 and verse 12: *"Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:12). Have you ever asked God to teach you His Word? Ask God to be your teacher. I was telling the businessmen Thursday about a man who had a Bible teacher, who taught him the Bible, and his name was Harry. And, the man was a new Christian, and he'd been studying the Bible; and Harry was his disciple. And, one day, he came on a knotty problem in the Scripture. He said, "I wish Harry were here—I wish Harry were here to teach me." And, the Lord said to him, "Well, now listen. I'm the One that taught Harry. Why don't you ask Me?" Friend, ask the Lord—ask the Lord, "Teach me Thy way."

Look, if you will, in verse 18: *"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"* (Psalm 119:18). Isn't that a beautiful prayer? "God, open my eyes." What you need to do when you come to the Bible is to lay your pride of intellect and your brilliance of mind in the dust, and say, "Dear God, if You don't teach me, I won't understand it." You will never go into the Bible and, with a lexicon and with a mind of logic and with a callous hand, just reach in and rip the truth out of the Bible. Oh no—God's going to reveal that truth to you as you pray.

1. Your Heart Will Be Stirred

When you pray, "Lord God do this," first of all, I'll tell you what will happen: your heart will be stirred. This is so important. Look in verse 36: *"Incline my heart unto thy testimonies"* (Psalm 119:36). God just gives you a hunger for the Word of God. God

inclines your heart when you pray.

2. Your Mind Will Be Enlightened

Then, not only will your heart be stirred, your mind will be enlightened. Look, if you will, in verse 73 of this same psalm: *“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding”*—*“give me understanding”*—*“that I may learn thy commandments”* (Psalm 119:73). Understanding—spiritual understanding—is a gift from God. And so, I would say, “Pray, come to God, and say, ‘O God, be Thou my teacher.’” And, begin your Bible study with sincere, earnest prayer, asking God to speak to your heart.

B. You Must Ponder the Word of God

All right, now, the second thing—not only must you pray over it, but, number two, you need to ponder it. That is, you need to seriously meditate on the Word of God. Look with me now in verse 15 of this psalm: *“I will meditate in thy precepts”* (Psalm 119:15). Look, if you will, in verse 23: *“Princes also did sit and speak against me”*—that is, “All the high muckety-mucks came against me”—*“but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:23). Isn’t that wonderful? Look, if you will, in verse 97 of this same psalm here: *“O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day”* (Psalm 119:97). You see, over and over and over again, you need to meditate on the Word of God. And, the Word of God has got to get into you for you to meditate, for you to ponder it.

And, this takes a certain amount of commitment. Most of us are not willing to pay the price. You’d just like to be zapped with Bible knowledge. But, you’re not going to get it that way. The Bible says you are to *“study to shew [yourself] approved unto God, a workman that [needs] not to be ashamed”* (2 Timothy 2:15). Look, if you will, in verse 127 of this same chapter—verse 127—and I’m going to talk about the commitment. Now listen: *“Therefore I love thy commandments above gold”* (Psalm 119:127). I wonder how many could honestly say that here today. How many could say, “I desire the Word of God more than I desire riches”?

Now, let the Holy Spirit of God speak to you for a moment. Very frankly, sirs and ladies, the reason that many of us don’t know the Word of God is we don’t really hunger for the Word of God. Is the Word of God more important to you than money? Look in verse 147: *“I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word”* (Psalm 119:147). That is, “I got up before daybreak to study the Bible.” You say, “I don’t have time to study the Bible”? Hey folks, you’ve got time to do everything you really want to do. If you’re too busy to study the Bible, you’re too busy. Look, if you will, in verse 148: *“Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word”* (Psalm 119:148). There, early in the morning and late at night, it’s the Word of God. You see, folks, you’ve got to ponder the Word of God, and you’ve got to get it into your heart—you’ve got to get it into your mind. And, when you read the Word of God, you’ve

got to be expecting God to give you something.

In your quiet time, do you keep a journal? When you go to study the Bible, do you get out a yellow pad and begin to write? I hope so. I mean, are you expecting God to give you anything? You are? Do you think it's going to be real good? You do? Then, aren't you going to write it down? You see, you're not even expecting Him to give you anything. Why, if you're expecting God to give you something, you'd better be prepared to write it down. If you don't, you'll forget it. *The weakest ink is better than the best memory.* Write it down. Keep a spiritual journal. Don't try to go so fast. Meditate in it, and let God speak to you. Last Sunday, I believe it was, I preached on how to handle your guilt. That came out of my morning devotions about four years ago, when I wrote down what God showed me out of that psalm. I would have forgotten that in four years if I'd not written that down and put that in a journal—and something that I can have to take out, and look at, and ponder, as God gave that to me.

Friend, one of the things I try to do almost every night before I go to bed is to put some of the Word of God in my mind to go to sleep on. And, to ponder on it in the night watches and as I put my head upon my pillow is to let that Scripture go through my mind. Meditate on it—meditate on it. Ponder the Word of God. The word *meditation* has the idea of like a tune. It's like the Word of God, as you think it over and over again. Now, I wish I had more time to tell you exactly how to put these things down. But, let me move on for the sake of time.

C. You Must Practice the Word of God

Not only must you pray over it and not only must you ponder it, but here's something so vitally important in Bible study: you must practice it, if you would learn it. Look in Psalm 119:167—167. Look at it—David says here, *“My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.”* All right, look, if you will, please, in Psalm 119, verse 168: he says here that *“I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies”* (Psalm 119:168). Now friend, I've got to get you to understand the Bible. You have to obey the Bible. As a matter of fact, one of the most dangerous things you can do is to read and study the Bible without obeying it. If you do that, not only will it fail to be helpful, it will become harmful to you, it will stultify you, it will harden you to truth. If you do not obey truth when God reveals truth to you, deception comes into your heart and into your mind.

Be swift, my soul, to answer Him!

Be jubilant, my feet!

—JULIA WARD HOWE

When God gives you a command, when God teaches you a truth, learn instant obedience, instant assimilation, instant application, instant rejoicing, instant response to the Word of God. I've told you, over and over and over again, the way to understand the

part of the Bible you don't understand is to obey the part you do understand. Why should God give you more light, when you've not lived up to the light that you have? I mean really, that's ridiculous to say, "God, show me what this means," when God said, "I showed you what that means, and you didn't do that; and I showed you what this meant, and you didn't do that. Why should I show you more light?" Practice the Word of God.

Mark Twain said, "It's not the part of the Bible I don't understand that gives me so much trouble; it's the part I do understand." And, I'm afraid that's true with many of us. Dear friend, we must learn to practice the Word of God. That's a simple principle, but how important it is! Jesus said, "*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father...and [I] will manifest myself to him*" (John 14:21). You want Him to be real to you? Then, begin to obey His Word.

D. You Must Proclaim What God Gives You

All right, now, here's the fourth principle. First one—let's review now: the first one is what? You've got to pray over it. Second, you've got to ponder it. Thirdly, you've got to practice it. Fourthly—and this is very important, and don't think this is a minor part: you must proclaim what God gives you. Now, if you want to be a bucket that God is going to fill, He's not interested. If you want to be a pipe through which God will flow, He's very interested. You see, God does not give you that knowledge just simply for your own edification, just for your own interest; God gives you knowledge in order that you might pass it on to other people.

Look, if you will, in this psalm and verse 13, would you please? Psalm 119, verse 13: "*With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth*" (Psalm 119:13). Do you see that? "*With my lips have I declared...*" (Psalm 119:13). Look, if you will, in verse 46 of this same chapter: "*I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed*" (Psalm 119:46). Look, if you will please, in Psalm 119, verse 172—look at it: "*My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness*" (Psalm 119:172). Over and over again, he says, "Teach me, Lord, and I'll tell it—I'll tell it."

Now, if you just simply want God to pour knowledge into you and it ends there, then you're going to miss the whole point. You see, my dear friend, one of the secrets of knowledge of the Bible is sharing the Bible. I have a built in blessing. For 35 plus years, I have been preaching the Word of God. Now, you think about that. I have studied over the Word of God, and prayed over the Word of God, and prepared the Word of God to give to other people. Now, here's a wonderful secret: the more of the Bible you give away, the more sticks to you—the more you give away, the more sticks to you.

Sometimes people say to me, “How do you remember little stories? You’re full of little stories. How do you remember little stories?” I tell ’em. Somebody tells me something I think is funny—I’ll tell somebody else in five minutes. And, once I do, that sticks in me—sticks in me. Just tell it—tell it. You ought to get a verse of scripture every morning—before you leave the house, have a verse of scripture—and the first person you meet, share it with them. Say, “Hey, let me show you what I found in the Word today,” and share it with them. I cannot tell you how that causes it to be burned into you.

You say, “Well, you’ve got a leg up on everybody. You’re a preacher.” All right, let me tell you what to do: you find somebody you can teach. Everybody find somebody you can teach. There’s somebody you ought to teach—somebody who needs you. It might be the little boy who lives next door. It might be a member of your family, might be one of your children, might be your wife, might be your husband, might be your children, might be that you need a Sunday School class. It might be that you need to go down here to the rescue mission. It might be that you need to stand on the street corner and preach. It might be a Bible class there where you work. But, you find someone that you can share the Word of God with. One man said to another man, “How come you can teach your dog tricks and I can’t teach my dog tricks?” He said, “Well, in the first place, you have to know more than the dog.”

Now listen, all you have to do—all you have to do—is to find someone you know more than, and you can teach ’em. And, you can learn more than anybody else quickly, quickly. Hey folks, the world is saturated with ignorance on the Word of God, right? We’re just saturated. So, you just learn what you learn and begin to share it; and as you begin to share it, you see—as you proclaim the Word of God—then you begin to understand the Word of God. And, you get the thrill—the thrill—of sharing God’s Word. And so, you must proclaim it.

E. You Must Personalize the Word of God

But, last of all—and oh, I’m so excited about this one—you must personalize it. Now, when I say you must personalize it, I don’t mean that you personalize it to you personally. That’s certainly true. But, I mean that you find out who the Bible is about, and you begin to look for Him everywhere; and His name is Jesus. Look, if you will here, in chapter 119, verse 135: *“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant”* (Psalm 119:135). Now friend, when you read the Word of God, read the Word of God so that the face of Jesus will shine upon you. Let Him become real to you. Jesus Christ is the key to the Bible. And, if you’ll look—if you read the Bible to find ramifications for your argument, if you’re trying to find some weird esoteric knowledge about the future, if you’re trying to find ways to be more happy, more healthy, more wealthy, hey, the Bible will become a dead book to you. But, if you study the Bible looking for the Lord Jesus Christ and find

the Lord Jesus Christ in the Bible, it becomes alive to you.

You see, all of the Bible is about Jesus—from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis, He's the Promised Land. In Exodus, He is the Passover Lamb. In Leviticus, He is the scapegoat. In Numbers, He is the brazen serpent, lifted up upon a pole. In Deuteronomy, He is the lawgiver. In Joshua, He is prophet, priest, and King. In Judges, He is the righteous Judge. In fourth, He is the Kinsman-Redeemer. In Samuel, He is the anointer. In Kings, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. In Chronicles, He is our history. In Ezra, He is the rebuilders of the temple. In Nehemiah, He is the rebuilders of the wall. In Esther, He is the Savior of the Jews. In Job, He is *"a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24). In Psalms, He is the Song of the ages. In Proverbs, He is the wisdom of God. In Ecclesiastes, He is the great preacher. In the Song of Solomon, He is the wonderful lover. In Isaiah, He is wonderful counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. In Lamentations, He's a street preacher. In Jeremiah, He is a weeping prophet. In Ezekiel, He is the restorer of the people of God. In Daniel, He's the stone cut out without hands. In Hosea, He is a spurned but a forgiving husband. In the minor prophets, He's the star rising in Bethlehem's sky. In Matthew, He's King of kings. In Mark, He's the suffering servant. In Luke, He's the Son of man. In John, He's the Son of God. In Acts, He's the mighty power of the Church. In Romans, He's the dynamite of the gospel. In Corinthians, He's the transformer of the carnal nature. In Galatians, He's the torn veil. In Ephesians, He's the Heavenly One. In Philippians, He's the all-sufficient One. In Colossians, He's the pre-eminent One. In Thessalonians, He's the coming Savior. In Timothy, He's the great appearing God. In Titus, He's the Blessed Hope. In Philemon, He is the emancipator of 911 wayward slaves. In Hebrews, He's the Best of All. In James, He's true religion. In Peter's epistles, He's the Rock of our salvation. In John's epistles, He's our assurance. In Jude, He's the One who's able to keep us from falling. And, in Revelation, He is the coming King on the white horse. It's all about Him—it's all about Him.

As I've told you before, it's a "Him" book—it's a "Him" book. It's about Jesus. And, when you personalize it, standing somewhere in the shadows, you'll find Jesus. Let me tell you—let me tell you, dear friend: if you get serious about this matter of Bible study, and if you will value it enough to know that it is absolute truth, that it brings joy and victory and power and growth and guidance, if you'll believe that and then pray over it, and then ponder it, and then practice it, and then proclaim it, oh, my dear friend—and if you will personalize it in the Lord Jesus Christ, and say, "Lord God, make Your face to shine upon me. Speak to me out of this book"—oh it will be a blessing to you and be with you.

Conclusion

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Father, bring Your Word into our heart in a very special way today. Father, I pray today that those who do not know Jesus will come to know Him. O God, open hearts to the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

How to Make Your Bible Come Alive

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 18, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119

"I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word."

PSALMS 119:16

Outline

Introduction

- I. You Must Appreciate the Virtues of the Word of God
 - A. It Is a Timeless Book
 - B. It Is a Truthful Book
 - 1. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Front
 - 2. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Rear
 - 3. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Side
 - C. It Is a Treasured Book
- II. You Must Assimilate the Vitality of the Word of God
 - A. You Pray over It
 - 1. Your Eyes Will be Opened
 - 2. Your Heart Will be Stirred
 - 3. Your Mind Will be Enlightened
 - B. You Ponder It
 - C. You Preserve It
 - D. You Practice It
 - E. You Proclaim It
- III. You Must Appropriately the Values of the Word of God
 - A. It Will be a Source of Victory
 - B. It Will be a Source of Growth
 - C. It Will be a Source of Joy
 - D. It Will be a Source of Power
 - E. It Will be a Source of Guidance

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you find Psalm 119? And, as you're finding it, look up here and let me tell you what a wise man said a long time ago:

*These hath God married and no man shall part
dust on the Bible and drought in the heart”*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Now, if you do not know, love, understand, practice, and obey the Word of God, I can tell you without stutter, stammer, or apology, you are not a victorious Christian. So, we want to learn today how to study the Bible—how to make your Bible come alive, how to make it burst aflame in your hand. And, what we’re going to be seeing today is taken from this wonderful Psalm, Psalm 119. You know, knowledge is power in any realm, whether it be in the business realm, in athletics, in theology—knowledge is power. Now, if you have power in good things, you’ll do good; if you have knowledge in bad things, you are a wicked person, but a powerfully wicked person if you have knowledge.

Now, what we want to do today is to learn how to get the knowledge from the Word of God. You know, what people need today is truth. Let me read to you a prayer from someone in Kenya—and here is the prayer: “Lord, from the cowardice that dares not face new truth, from the laziness that is contented with apathy, from the arrogance which thinks it has all truth, good Lord, deliver me. Amen.” Now, I hope that you’ll not have cowardice this morning and be afraid of truth, that you’ll not have laziness and accept half-truth, or that you will not have arrogance and think that you need no truth. Friend, it is knowledge—it is truth—that transforms.

There was a sign in a business that said, “We are not what we think we are; what we think we are.” Did you hear—understand—that? “We are not what we think we are,” but rather, “what we think we are.” That is, you are what you think. “*As [a man] thinketh...so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). That’s what the Bible says in Proverbs 23, verse 7. Now, if that is true, if knowledge is power, we need the knowledge of the Word of God to have spiritual power. We need to be molded, motivated, and managed by the Word of God. And yet, for many, many in this congregation, the Bible remains a closed book, a mysterious book. And, they really give lip service to the Bible, but they really do not understand it. Now, there’s no cheap way, there’s no lazy way, there’s no magical way to understand the Bible, but it is not impossible. As a matter of fact, it is joyful; it is thrilling. So, we want to talk to you today about how to understand the Word of God.

Now, this Psalm, Psalm 119, is by far the longest psalm in the Bible, and it is what we call an “acrostic.” Now, an acrostic is something that starts with an arrangement of letters. This acrostic is an acrostic on the Hebrew Bible, and it is divided up into sections. There are 22 stanzas, and each stanza—you wouldn’t know that by reading it in English—but each stanza starts with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet and goes through the sections—22 sections. And, each section in these 22 sections starts with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, or each verse in each of these 22 sections starts with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. I know that’s a great blessing to you,

but anyway, that's truth—that is true. And, you would understand that there is a—sort of a—logical arrangement here. And, the writer of this 119th psalm is writing to give us some statements about the Word of God. The entire psalm—many verses, well over 100 verses—each of these verses is dealing with the Word of God, to help us know and understand the Word of God.

Now, I want to tell you three things—and there'll be some subsets under these things—but I want to tell you three things, that if you will do these things, I can promise you—and I've prayed over this; I've thought over this—if you will do these three things, I can promise you that the Bible will burst aflame in your heart, in your mind, and in your life.

I. You Must Appreciate the Virtues of the Word of God

Number one: You must appreciate the virtues of the Word of God. Now, if you don't appreciate the virtues of the Word of God, you're not gonna have any desire to learn it or know it. Many people do not understand the great value, the great virtue, in the Word of God. You must have an appreciation for the Word of God. Why should you appreciate the Word of God?

A. It Is a Timeless Book

Number one: Because it is a timeless book. Put that in your notes—a timeless book. Look, if you will now, in verse... Well, let's look in verse 89, for example, in this psalm. He says here in verse 89: *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven”* (Psalm 119:89). That is, the Bible is not the book of the month; it is not the book of the year. It is the book of ages; it is an unchanging book. Look, if you will, in verse 152 of this same psalm: *“Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them”—what?—“for ever”* (Psalm 119:152). Forever! God says, “It is done. It's settled in Heaven. I have founded it forever.” Look, if you will, in verse 160: *“Thy word is true from the beginning”* (Psalm 119:160). You see, folks, other books come and go. The Bible is here to stay; it is founded in Heaven.

Thousands of years have passed since the Bible was written. Empires have risen and fallen and gone from the scene. Civilizations have changed and re-changed. Science is pushing back the frontiers of knowledge. And yet, the Bible stands. There have been emperors who have decreed the extermination of the Bible. There are plenty of atheists who laugh at the Bible and who have railed at it. There are agnostics who cynically sneer at the Bible. There are liberals who have moved Heaven and Earth to remove the miracles from the Bible. There are many materialists who just simply ignore the Bible. But, the Bible stands. There are radicals and cultists who rave over it. One of the ways I know the Bible is the Word of God—it's stood up under so much shoddy

preaching. The Bible is settled in Heaven.

A former pastor of this church, Dr. Robert G. Lee, said this—and I quote him now: speaking of the Bible, he says, “All of its enemies have not torn one whole in its holy vesture, nor stolen one flower from its wonderful garden, nor diluted one drop of honey from its abundant hive, nor broken one string on its thousand-stringed harp, nor drowned one sweet word in infidel ink.” He’s just simply saying what God says about himself: *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven”* (Psalm 119:89). And, just as an ancillary verse from the New Testament, put “1 Peter chapter 1, verse 25”: *“But the word of the Lord endureth”*—any body know the next word?—*“for ever”* (1 Peter 1:25). That’s good. *“The word of the Lord endureth for ever”* (1 Peter 1:25).

The Bible is timeless. The Bible is ultimate. The Bible is indestructible. So, we’re saying—we’re talking—of the virtues of the Word of God that you must appreciate. It’s a timeless book.

B. It Is a Truthful Book

Number two: It is a truthful book. Do you have that? It is a truthful book. Look, if you will, in verse 142: *“Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the [proof]”* (Psalm 119:142). Look, if you will, in 151: *“Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth”* (Psalm 119:151). Look, if you will, in verse 160: *“Thy word is [truth] from the beginning”* (Psalm 119:160). Pilate asked Jesus, *“What is truth?”* (John 18:38). Jesus said in John chapter 17, speaking to the Father, *“Thy word is truth”* (John 17:17). And, in a world that has lost its appreciation for truth, you can say without stutter or stammer that the Bible is truth.

Now, we have some theological experts today who think they ought to reexamine the Bible. As far as I’m concerned, we ought to reexamine them—I’m serious. Now, there are all kinds of attacks on the Bible—the truth of the Bible—today.

1. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Front

There’s just a sheer frontal attack of liberalism—the liberals who deny it.

2. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Rear

And then, there’s an attack from the rear, which is perhaps more insidious. And, these are not those who deny it, but these are the sort of—I don’t know what to call them—sort of a lunatic fringe. And, they’re talking about their experiences all of the time, and they’re saying, “Well, I know what I feel or what I think.” And, sometimes they’ll even argue with you, and they’ll say, “I don’t care what the Bible says. Let me tell you what I experienced.”

Paul had to deal with some of those in Corinth, and Paul said to them—and put this verse down (1 Corinthians 14, verses 37 and 38): *“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the*

commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). There were some who had gotten off into charismatic hocus pocus in Corinth, and they'd go wild about tongues, and prophecies, and visions, and ecstasies. And, Paul tried to set them in order, and they were saying, "Oh, well, let me tell you, Brother Paul, what a spiritual man I am. And, let me tell you, Brother Paul, I have the gift of prophecy." Paul says, "If you think you're a prophet, if you think you're spiritual, then you will acknowledge what I say is the Word of God." And then, he says something almost humorous: he said, "*If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant*" (1 Corinthians 14:38)—just a shrug of his shoulders. Evidently, he'd met some of these people that you and I meet around here today. They're—listen, folks—there are people who want to bring the Bible under their experience.

3. People Are Attacking the Bible from the Side

I say, there is the frontal attack against the Bible by those who rail against it and deny it. There's an attack from the rear by those who want to substitute their experience for the Word of God. And then, there's an attack from the flank—from the side. These are they who don't necessarily deny the Bible, but they kind of want to replace it, or they want to prop it up with psychology and with philosophy and these other things, as if the Bible itself is not good enough. But friend, the Bible is true; and if you're looking for truth, you can find it in the Bible.

And, why is this? Put this verse down—2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16. And, it says this: "*All scripture*"—listen—"All scripture"—all holy writing—"is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). That word *inspiration* is used only once in the Bible, but what a magnificent word it is: *theopneustos*—theopneustos. It means, literally, "it is God-breathed" (*theo* meaning "God," *pneustos* meaning "the breath of God"). If we were to pronounce it as it is written, we'd say *pneustos*, like a pneumatic, pneumonia. We don't say p-neumonia; we say pneumonia. But, it actually has to do with the breath. We say a pneumatic tire; we don't say a p-neumatic tire. But, what he's saying is *theo-pneustos*, or *theopneustos*. That is, it is the breath of God.

What are you hearing right now? You're hearing the breath of Adrian. I am speaking, and so my lungs have air. My diaphragm, my rib cage, is forcing the lungs to expel the air. The air is coming up out of my throat, over my larynx; it is causing my vocal chords to vibrate. And, my tongue, and my teeth, and my lips are making sounds. And, what you are hearing right now is the breath of Adrian.

Now, what the Bible says—"all scripture is the breath of God; it is God-breathed." Read where Jesus said in Matthew chapter 4, verse 4: "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word*"—now, listen to this next phrase—"by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). He was talking about the Bible—he was talking about the Bible. And, he says that every word proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). It is not simply that God breathed into the scriptures; God breathed

the scriptures out. Yes, He used human penmen; yes, there was Isaiah, Jeremiah; yes, there was Matthew and Paul; yes, there was Mark—but these men were the penmen of God; these men were the voice of God as God was speaking. *“Holy men of God spake as they were moved”*—the Bible says—*“by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Peter 1:21). And, therefore, the Bible is true, because a God of truth could not speak error. Say, “Amen.”

Listen, if you pick up just the Old Testament, you will find phrases like this: “the Word of the Lord,” or “the Word of God,” or “God spake,” or “the Lord said.” You will find that phrase used 3,808 times. God said, “The Word of the Lord came unto me,” “thus saith the Lord” 3,808 times. If the Bible is not the very Word of God, it’s the biggest bundle of lies that have ever come to Planet Earth. No, it is truth—absolutely.

C. **It Is a Treasured Book**

Listen, what am I saying? The Bible is a timeless book. The Bible is a truthful book. And, the Bible, therefore, should be a treasured book. Look, if you will, in verse 72 of this same thing: he says here, *“The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver”* (Psalm 119:72). I wonder if that is true of you. I’m gonna tell you the truth: God knows, and God is listening to me right now. That is absolutely true of me. If you were to heap this side of this platform—I mean heap it—with gold, silver, rubies, diamonds, bonds, stocks ’till it went from floor to ceiling, and over here put the Word of God, and said, “You can have one or the other; you cannot have both,” I would not have to hesitate: I’d choose this—I would choose this. I wouldn’t even have to think about it. It would be—it would be—a given. Look, if you will, in verse 103: *“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey [unto] my mouth!”* (Psalm 119:103). Look, if you will, in verse 127: *“Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold”* (Psalm 119:127). It is to be a treasured book.

The saints and the heroes have pillowed their heads on the Word of God as they walked through the chilly waters of the river of death. Yesterday, right over there in that chapel, I had a funeral for a saint of God, Dora Dunavant. Oh, friend, she looked into the face of death with a smile because she had pillowed her head upon the Word of God. And, the martyrs who died for the witness of Jesus Christ have held the Bible to their bosom as the creeping flames would come around their feet. Oh, the early Church—they loved the Word of God. They never questioned it. They argued very little about it. They preached it. They proclaimed it. They pronounced it. They poured it forth like white hot lava. They loved it. They lived it. They practiced it. They trusted it. They obeyed it. They claimed it constantly.

You know why the Bible is treasured? You’ve known it for a long time:

*Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.*

—SUSAN WARNER

That's it.

*Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.*

You will never have a victorious Christian life if you do not love this book.

Now, it is like treasure. Suppose there were buried treasure in your backyard. You'd go down to the hardware store and get a spade (if you don't have one). Folks, I'm telling you, this is God's treasured book. It is a timeless book. It is a truthful book. It is a treasured book. So, the first point is you must—you must—appreciate the virtues of the Word of God—you must appreciate the virtues of the Word of God—because if you don't, you're not gonna have any desire to understand it.

II. You Must Assimilate the Vitality of the Word of God

Now, here's the second thing: not only must you appreciate the virtues of the Word of God; you must assimilate—assimilate—the vitality of the Word of God, because... I chose the word *vitality* on purpose because the word *vitality* means “alive.” Now, listen—the Bible is a living book. Hebrews 4:12—put it in your margin: “*the word of God is quick, and powerful.*” The word *quick* means “alive.” It is the word we get our word *zoo* from—*zoology* from. It is *zoa* and *energes*. And, *alive* is a word we get our word *energy* from. It is—it is—living; it is energetic.

Jesus, in John chapter 6, was speaking to some unbelievers, and He said to them and to His disciples—listen to it in John chapter 6, verse 63: “*the words that I speak unto you*”—listen to this—“*the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63). See, the Bible is vibrant; the Bible pulsates with life. Now, that's the reason that I'm saying that not only must you appreciate it—you must assimilate it. *You don't just read the cookbook; you eat the meal.*

Now, if you don't assimilate it, no matter how much you appreciate it, what good is it going to do you? Now, how do you assimilate the Word of God? Get your pen; write these first things down:

A. You Pray over It

Number one: Write down, “Pray over it.” Did you write it down? You don't intend to internalize it this morning 'cause you're not... Listen, folks—pray over it. Look, if you will, in verse 12 of this chapter now—verse 12: “*Blessed art thou, O LORD*”—here it is—“*teach me thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:12). Have you ever prayed that? Lord God, be my teacher. Pray over it; ask God to teach you. When you pray over it, what will happen?

1. Your Eyes Will Be Opened

Number one: Your eyes will be opened. Look, if you will, in verse 18: “*Open thou mine*

eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). God will open your eyes. There are scales over your eyes until God takes the scales off so you can read this book. You may have 20/20 vision, but God has to open your eyes to “*behold wondrous things [in] thy law*” (Psalm 119:18). Do you remember, then, the 24th chapter of Luke? After His resurrection, Jesus is walking with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the Bible says He began to talk to them about the Old Testament, the law, and the prophets (Luke 24:44). And then, here’s a great verse: in Luke 24 and verse 45, it says, “*Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures*” (Luke 24:45). Wouldn’t you like for God to do that for you?

2. Your Heart Will Be Stirred

Pray over it, and I’m telling you, when you pray over it, first of all, your eyes will be opened. And then, number two: Your heart will be stirred. Look in verse 36 of this same chapter: “*Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness*” (Psalm 119:36). If you have a desire for the Word of God, why don’t you say, “O God, please incline my heart, move my heart, open my eyes, stir my heart”?

3. Your Mind Will Be Enlightened

And then, folks, when your eyes are opened, your heart is stirred, then your mind is going to be enlightened. Look, if you will, in verse 73 of this same psalm: “*Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments*” (Psalm 119:73). How often in sermon preparation have I put my pencil down, have I bowed my head and said, “O my God, help me to understand this. God, give me understanding”? Now, all of this is under the heading of “We Must Pray over It”—“We Must Pray over It.” When we pray, friend, our eyes are opened, our heart is moved, our mind is enlightened to understand the Word of God. So, now we’re talking now how to assimilate it. Number one: You pray over it.

B. You Ponder It

Number two: You ponder it. Look, if you will, in verse 15 of this same psalm: “*I will meditate in thy precepts*” (Psalm 119:15). Do you see that? Look, if you will, in verse 147 of this same psalm: “*I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: [and] I hoped in thy word*”—that is, “I got up early in the morning, and I trusted in Your Word.” That is, “I had a quiet time.” Look, if you will, in verse 148—“*Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word*” (Psalm 119:147–148). You see, it takes time. If you have to rise an hour early, do it. If you have to stay up an hour late, do it, that you might ponder the Word of God.

And, when you—when you—sit there, and after you’ve prayed over it and you ponder it, do it with a pen in your hand. Take a pen. If I smoked cigars, I’d be awful. I like something to chew on, or something. I’m glad I don’t smoke cigars. Joyce is doubly

glad I don't smoke anything. But, I'll take one of these pens, and I'll just eat it to death. I chew on it, and I just destroy it when I'm—when I'm...or a pencil. So, I just chew on pencils. That's a bad habit, but I do it. But, I'll tell you one thing, folks: I read the Bible with a pen in my hand or a pencil in my hand. Do you? You see, if you don't, you know what it tells me? You're not expecting to receive anything. If you're expecting to receive something, you're gonna get ready to write it down. You say, "Well, I'll remember it." I hope you do, but *the weakest ink is better than the best memory*. You simply get a pad when you open the Bible, and you pray. Then, you ponder it, and you get ready for God to speak to you.

And, when you read the Bible, use your sanctified common sense. Don't just jump into the middle of a chapter, the middle of a book somewhere—no plan, no rhyme, no reason. And, you see, the Bible is like any other book: it has all kinds of forms of speech. You see poetry as poetry. You see prophecy as prophecy. You see precept as precept. You see promise as promise—see proverb as proverb.

For example, if you try to turn the proverbs into promises, you'll lose your religion. The proverbs are not promises; they're proverbs. What is a proverb? A proverb is a general principle generally applied, brings a general result. For example, in the Book of Proverbs, there are ways to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, but you can do all those things and get hit by a truck. You're not very wealthy any more—you left it all. You're certainly not very healthy, and you weren't too wise: you didn't look both ways. Now, what I'm trying to say is this: a proverb is good, but don't try to turn the proverbs into promises. Look at the Bible, and look at these: Is this a precept? Is this a prophecy? Is this poetry? Is this prose? Is this proverb? Is this promise? Hey, folks, did you know that God gave you a mind? Now, God doesn't zap you with knowledge. You have the mind of Christ; use your mind as you study the Bible, you ponder the Bible.

Sometimes people ask, "Well, is the Bible to be interpreted literally or figuratively?" Have you ever heard that? You want to know the answer? Yes. It is to be interpreted figuratively and literally all at the same time. For example, the Bible is full of symbols. In the Book of Revelation, the devil is symbolized—the devil is symbolized—as a dragon, a huge dragon. He has a tail so long that he sweeps a third of the stars from Heaven. Have you just read about the new world that the Hubble telescope has discovered billions of light years out there? Now, you tell me if there's a dragon with a tail long enough to sweep down all the stars of Heaven some billions of light years away. That's a pretty big dragon. He's talking about the devil. The stars are the fallen angels that fell. That's symbolism. It's full of symbolism—the Bible is full of symbolism. But, *you find out what the symbol stands for, and you literally believe it*. Don't say, "Oh, that's just symbolism; there is no devil." No, that's symbolism. There is a devil, you see.

The yellow arches—that's McDonald's, right? You're driving... Hey, listen—my little

old Andrew can't read, but he knows that's McDonald's—he knows that's McDonald's—because that is a symbol. Now, if you see those yellow arches, will you say, “Oh, that's just a symbol. There is no McDonald's restaurant, no such thing as hamburgers”? You wouldn't say that. That's just a symbol. You find out what the symbol stands for, and then you literally apply it.

So, what I'm trying to say is when you get the Word of God, you pray over it, then you ponder it—you begin to ask God to teach you. I've given you this before, but I want to give you six questions. You ask these six questions. Now, get your pencil, and write these six questions down. My wife says, “You always go too fast when you say these.” Number one: Is there a promise to claim? You're looking at a passage—is there a promise to claim? Number two: Is there a lesson to learn? Number three: Is there a blessing to enjoy? Number four: Is there a command to obey? Number five: Is there a sin to avoid? Number six: Is there a new thought to carry with me?

Are you preparing a Sunday School lesson? Get any passage of Scripture—any passage—and just look at it, and just ask those questions; and you've got your lesson. I promise you—just six simple questions as you look at the Word of God. You've prayed over it, and you say, “O God, open my eyes.” You say, “Dear God, move my heart. Dear God, give me understanding.” And then, you look at the Word of God, and you ponder it and you think about it. And, you've got a pen, and you write these things down. You read it through, you think it clear, you write it down, you pray it in, you live it out, and you pass it on—and it's yours; it's yours. You say, “I can't remember all that.” Okay, get the tape, because we've got to move on.

C. You Preserve It

Number one: You pray over it. Number two: You ponder it. Number three: You preserve it—you preserve it. Look, if you will, here in verse 11. We're back in our psalm again. Look, if you will, in verse 11: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). Look, if you will, in verse 16: *“I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word”* (Psalm 119:16). That means that you preserve it; you hide it down in your heart.

You can remember far more than you think you can remember. Folks, let me tell you something: don't tell me you can't remember. You could not function if you couldn't remember things. How many of you drove to church this morning? Let me see your hands. How many of you came with somebody who drove, but you didn't drive? Let me see your hands. All right. That's most of us. Now, suppose the person driving that automobile couldn't remember which was the accelerator and which was the brake. We'd have a small crowd here this morning. I mean, memory—we function by memory. And, memory comes with concentration. Memory comes with motivation. Memory

comes with use. Your mind is a marvel, and you can remember far more than you think you can remember as you preserve the Word of God.

When women go off, they want to buy pretty boxes. My wife has this love affair with little boxes—pretty little boxes. And, sometimes people bring from overseas boxes, and sometimes they...oh, they're intricately carved, and they may have jewels and so forth on the outside of them. You've seen these little boxes that sit around. And, you see a beautiful box like...and you say, "What a marvelous little box!" And then, you look inside. You know what's inside? Rubber bands, gem clips, toothpicks, an old breath mint—inside that beautiful box. Your mind is like that box: you've got all this junk in it.

What a marvel God gave you when God gave you a mind! And so, you can't meditate on the Word of God unless it's there. Or, your mind is like a garden. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to grow weeds than flowers and vegetables? Well, when Adam fell, his mind became a garden of weeds. And, in order for your mind to preserve the Word of God, you have got to cultivate your mind; you have to weed your garden.

D. You Practice It

Now, next—and I don't have time for that because we must rush on—not only must you preserve it—here's the fourth thing: you must practice it. Look, if you will, in the first four verses of Psalm 119: "*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with [a] whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*" (Psalm 119:1–4). It's not enough to recite the promises without obeying the commandments.

Simple secret: Do you want to learn more about the Word of God? Do you? Then, obey the part you know. That is so simple. The Bible says, "To him that hath shall be given" (Matthew 13:12). The rich get richer. The more you obey, the more you learn it. Keep the Word of God.

You say, "Well, there's a lot of the Bible I don't understand." You know what Mark Twain is reported to have said? He's reported to have said, "It's not that part of the Bible I don't understand that gives me so much trouble; it's the part I do understand." Huh? Okay. Now, listen—there may be mysteries and things you don't understand about the third toe on the left foot on some beast in Revelation, but I tell you, you can understand when the Bible says, "*Love one another,*" (John 13:34) can't you? You can understand when the Bible gives you clear and plain commandments. And, if you will begin to keep these, the Word of God—it will become real to you.

E. You Proclaim It

Next, you must—you must—proclaim it. This is the fifth of these things you do if you are

going to assimilate. Look, if you will, in verse 13: *“With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth”—“with my lips”* (Psalm 119:13). Look in verse 27: *“Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works”* (Psalm 119:27). Look, if you will, in verse 46: *“I will speak of thy [testimony] also before kings, and will not be ashamed”* (Psalm 119:46). Look, if you will, in verse 172 of this same psalm here: *“My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness”* (Psalm 119:172). You see, give it away. Let the Word of God be in your mouth—constantly in your mouth. Stow it in your heart. Show it in your life. Sow it in the world. The more the Word of God you give away, the more of it will stick to you.

III. You Must Appropriate the Values of the Word of God

Now, here—I’ve got to move to the final thing. Look, what we said is this: you must appreciate the virtues of the Word of God. Number two: You must assimilate the vitality of God. And, number three: It is then that you can appropriate the values of the Word of God—that is that this knowledge that you have is going to become a transformation. I’m just gonna give you the outline. I can’t fill in the points. You just write them down.

A. It Will Be a Source of Victory

Number one: It’ll be a source of victory—verse 45 (Psalm 119:45). Just as Jesus overcame Satan in the wilderness with the Word, you will overcome.

B. It Will Be a Source of Growth

It will be a source of growth—verse 32 (Psalm 119:32).

People say, “Oh, Pastor, I’m just so weak in my physical life. I can hardly get out of bed. I just don’t want to go to work. I’m just so weak.” I say, “Well, what’s the matter? You been to the doctor?” “No.” “You got a disease?” “I don’t think so.” “Well, Good Lord, man, what are you eating?” “Well, I have this restaurant I go to on Sundays sometimes if it’s not raining, and I get a meal there—that’s all I eat.” You mean that’s all you eat? You just go to this restaurant on Sunday, and you get a meal there if it’s not raining—that’s all you eat?” “Yeah, I’m just so weak.” Friend, this, oh, this is just to whet your appetite. If you don’t learn how to feed yourself the Word of God, you’re not going to grow. The Bible says, *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that [you] may grow thereby”* (1 Peter 2:2). It’s a source of growth.

C. It Will Be a Source of Joy

It’s a source of joy—verses 54 and 111 (Psalm 119:54; Psalm 119:111). I don’t have time to talk about that. But, *“these things have I spoken unto you...that your joy might be full”* (John 15:11).

D. It Will Be a Source of Power

It's a source of power. *"The word of God is quick, and powerful"* (Hebrews 4:12).

E. It Will Be a Source of Guidance

It's a source of guidance. Well, let's give you one for power—verse 28 (Psalm 119:28). It's a source of guidance—verse 105: *"Thy word is a lamp unto my [path]...a light unto my path"—"and a light unto my [feet]"* (Psalm 119:105).

The Word of God—the Word of God—it will give you all of these things. You want joy? You want power? You want victory? You want to be able to overcome? You want these wonderful things? You can appropriate them, but you can only appropriate them after you assimilate them, and you can only assimilate them if you appreciate them. And, I'm promising you that if you'll do that, it will be transformational in your life.

Conclusion

Now, could we just sum up the Bible right now? For those of you who are not Christians, or maybe you've never been saved, can I just give you the Bible in shorthand? The Bible addresses one problem, and that problem is sin. The Bible has one villain, and that villain is the devil. The Bible has one hero, and His name is Jesus. The Bible has one purpose, and that is the glory of God.

Do you know Jesus? Do you know Him? You see, this book is a two-edged sword. If it doesn't cut to heal you; it will cut to slay you. It's a saber of life unto life or death unto death. And, God wants me to tell you something today that's gonna come right out of this book: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever"—that means you—"that whosoever"—that means any body—"[believes] in him"—puts their faith, their trust, in Him—"[they will] not perish"—they will not die and go to Hell; they will not—"but [they will] have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). That's what we sang about: we sang about Heaven. A few more days, and we're passing on.

Do you know Jesus? Oh, just pray and say, "Lord Jesus, come into my heart today. Forgive my sin, and save me."

Now, look—every eye right here. We're going to sing an invitational hymn. Listen to me carefully: if you're not certain you're saved, and you want to be—you want to get it settled—listen, listen, listen: don't let the devil take away your mind. We're going to sing an invitational hymn. The ministers of this church are gonna be standing here at the head of each of these aisles. There will be a minister standing under that banner over there that says, "Redeemer," up in the balcony—a minister standing under that one that says, "Messiah," on that side of the balcony, for those of you in the balcony. Then, we're going to stand, and we're going to sing an invitational hymn.

And, I'm going to ask you; and you; and you; and you, sir; and you, young lady; and

you, young man, to get up out of your seat, come down one of these aisles, and just tell this minister, “I am trusting Jesus”—“I am trusting Jesus.” And, by faith, just give Him your heart, your life. Believe that He paid for your sins with His blood on the cross. Believe that God raised Him from the dead. Trust Him only and Him always to save you. Give all you know of you to all you know of Him. You’ll learn a whole lot more as you go on about both Him and you, but just come and make that start this morning. Just say to the minister, “I’m trusting Jesus.” What we will do is to take a Bible, give you some scripture to stand on, guide you in this decision, and seal it in prayer. It’ll take just a few minutes. You’ll be so glad that you did. From all over the building, I want you to come and say, “I’m trusting Jesus.”

Then, there are others of you who’ve already trusted the Lord—you believe in a Bible-based church and a Bible-based ministry, and that’s what you want. And, you need a church home. I’m going to invite you to come down one of these aisles and tell the minister, “I just want to place my membership here,” and he’ll tell you how you may become a member of this church. Now, those who come for church membership, we’re talking about those who’ve been saved and who know the Lord. You don’t join a church unless you’re saved. Okay. Some are coming, saying, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Others are coming, saying, “I’m a Christian. I want to place my membership here.” And, we’ll tell you how you may become a member of this wonderful church. If you’ve not had believer’s baptism as we understand it, we’d want the joy of baptizing you as a believer in Christ.

Now, just before we stand and sing, listen to me carefully. This is the climax and, in many ways, the most important part of all that we’re doing. Eternal destinies may be decided in the next few moments. Don’t disturb the service by leaving early. Be in a spirit of prayer. Pray for those round about you. If you’re with somebody, if you know them well and you think they may need to make a decision (and want to), you may volunteer to come forward with them. How beautiful to see one friend bring another friend to Jesus! You could even just put your hand on their hand as if to say, “If you want to go, I’ll go with you.” Be in a spirit of prayer. And, precious friend, if you want Jesus, you come. The Bible says, “Whosoever will may come.” (Revelation 22:17) Let’s stand together.

The Bible: The Book of the Ages

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 28, 1993

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119

“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

PSALMS 119:160

Outline

Introduction

- A. The Bible Is the Old Time Book
- B. The Bible Is the New Time Book
- C. The Bible Is the Any Time Book
- D. The Bible Is the Every Time Book
- E. The Bible Is the End Time Book
- I. You Must Pray over the Bible
- II. You Must Ponder the Bible
- III. You Must Practice the Bible
- IV. You Must Proclaim the Bible

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and turn to Psalm 119. In my study by my door is a Bible, and that Bible stays open to this psalm, Psalm 119. And almost every night or morning or Wednesday when I step out of my study, I walk past that Bible and I look into Psalm 119 and I take a verse and let that verse just resonate in my heart, because all of Psalm 119 is a tribute to the Word of God.

Now, today, this morning, I talked to you about four ways to better understand the Bible. And then I said tonight we were going to expand that last way. We said that you ought to welcome the Word with reflection. That is, you ought to reflect on the Word of God and look into the Word of God and let the Word of God look into you.

A. **The Bible Is the Old Time Book**

Well, I want us to think tonight a little bit about the Word of God. The Bible, you know, is not the book-of-the-month; it is the book of the ages. It is, for example, the old time book. Look, if you will, in verse 160: “Thy word is true from the beginning....” That’s pretty old time, isn’t it? You can’t get more old time than that. You see, from the very

beginning the word was in the heart, the mind, the bosom of the Almighty, and it was delivered to men. It did not originate with men. The Bible says, “Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” That means there was never a time when the Word of God was not yet. And that Word of God that was in the beginning was delivered to us and it was given by divine inspiration. And the writing of the Bible is a literary miracle, a miracle, a literary miracle. The Bible says in 11 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God....” And the word there, theopneustos, means that it is God breathed.

What you’re hearing right now is my breath being pushed from my diaphragm, out of my lungs, over my larynx, and, ah, being articulated by my lips and my teeth and my tongue vibrating in the air and reaching your ear. You’re hearing my words. Now, the word theopneustos means “the breath of God.” All Scripture is God breathed. Not that God breathed into the Scriptures, but the Scriptures are God speaking. They are the voice of God. Three thousand, eight hundred and eight times in the Bible we hear a phrase like this: “God said, the Lord spake, the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying,” or, “Thus saith the Lord.” Three thousand, eight hundred and eight times the Bible declares itself to be the Word of God. If it is not, it is the biggest bundle of lies every assembled. You, you can’t just tip your hat toward the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God. It is the old time book.

B. The Bible Is the New Time Book

But not only is it the old time book, it is the new time book. Look, if you will, in verse 52 of this same psalm, verse 52: “I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.” Now it was the old time book, but the psalmist said, “I remembered it.” It became the new time book. That is, the Bible, written centuries ago, ha, ha, ha, we remember tonight and it is new, it is fresh, it is the new time book.

Here we are in this modern, spacious auditorium. Here we are in the 20th Century. Here we are in the day of jets and laser beams and television and micro surgery. Here we are in the day of genetic engineering still remembering this book just as new and just as fresh and just as up to date as tomorrow’s newspaper and a whole lot more accurate. It is the new time book. Men have laughed at this book. Men have scorned it. Men have ignored it. Men have burned it. Men have made laws against it. But it stands today. And I love this book today. You say, “Are, are you a modern man?” Well, it all depends on what you mean. I live in a modern society, but this book, this book is new and fresh. Men have tried to ridicule the book and get rid of it. I’m reminded of a man who was commissioned to build a wall that could not fall down. So he said, “I built a wall and it won’t fall down because it is four feet high and five feet thick. And if anyone pushes it over, it’ll be higher than it was before.” That’s the way the Bible is, friend. Men have, have, ah, warred against it, men have thrown the old book in the fire, but it comes out without even the smell of smoke in its garments. It has outlived, out-looked,

outreached, outranked, out-blessed all other books put together.

C. **The Bible Is the Any Time Book**

But not only is it the old time book, not only is it the new time book, but, therefore, it is the any time book. Look in verse 24: “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.” Now, you want something to give you joy and give you wisdom. Well, you’d better get in the Word of God.

What is so wonderful about this book is, is it just simply the any time book. Any time you need a blessing you can come to the Bible and get it. If you’re lost, it’s saving for the sinner. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.....” And I have watched this book. You know, I’ve preached it enough to know the power of it. I’ve preached enough to learn that He says, “Is not my word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” I’ve seen people come to watch me and listen to me, and they say, “Well, now let’s hear what this fool will say.” And, ah, and, you know, they come to find fault and to criticize or critique or whatever. But after a while, the Word of God moves in and Adrian Rogers is put to the side and they hear the Word of God. And God says, “Is not my word like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” You know, you can take a hard rock and just keep tapping and that rock will split. You see, this book, this book is saving to the sinner.

And it is sweet to the saint. Not only does it lead you to Christ, but oh, ohm, it is so sweet to feed upon. The Bible speaks of a righteous man in Psalm 1, and the Bible says, “His delight is in the law of the God, and in his law doeth he meditate day and night.” One great saint said, “I have no greater joy than to be in a nook with the book.” The child of God has an inner witness that this book is the Word of God. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice.”

Saving to the sinner. Sweet to the saint. Sufficient to the sufferer. Friend, you’re going to find out that when trouble comes, anguish comes, and it will come, you’ll have a book that you can hold to your heart. And when you lie down in sorrow, you can pillow your head upon the Word of God. And when your feet touch those chilly waters of the river of death, the Word of God will mean more to you than anything else.

When Sr. Walter Scott was dying, he said to his nephew, “Bring me the book.” Well, Sr. Walter Scott, that great Christian, had a library filled with thousands of books. His nephew said, “Uncle, what book?” He said, “Don’t ask what book. There is but one book. Bring me the Bible.” And I want to tell you, the saints of the ages have held it to their bosoms and found joy in it. It is sufficient to the sufferer.

And, friend, it is satisfying to the scholar. I have been studying the Bible seriously now for longer than I really like to think, almost one-half century I have been studying this book. And I feel like I’ve just stepped inside the door. I feel like there’s so much to learn. The Bible transcends the natural mind of man because it contains the mind of

God. And the apostle Paul said, “Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable at his judgments and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord and who hath been his counselor?” Oh, friend, you will never plumb the depths of this book.

And Dr. R. A. Torrey once said, “Many men of strongest intellect, of marvelous power of penetration, of broadest culture have given a lifetime to the study of the Bible. And no man who has really studied it has ever dreamed of saying he has gotten to the bottom of the book. New light is constantly breaking forth from the Word of God. The fact that it has proved itself unfathomable for these centuries is positive proof that in it are hidden the infinite treasures of the wisdom of God.”

Friend, the deeper you search into this mine of blessed truth, the deeper and wider and more precious becomes the vein of priceless gems and gold that you will find from it.

D. The Bible Is the Every Time Book

But not only is it, friend, the any time book. It's also the every time book. That is, everything that you need to know about God you'll find in the Bible. Look, if you will, in verses 96: “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment [look at this now] is exceeding broad.” Broad. It is the every time book. “O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Turn to the Bible. How are you going to learn? By human reason? Ha, ha, ha. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. You say, “Well, I'm going to follow my conscience.” Well, friend, your conscience is like a sundial; only true light can make it register correctly, and that light comes from the Word of God. Are you going to follow tradition? Jesus warned in Mark 7:13 of making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition. No! The Bible is the every time book.

Did you know that God gave this tribute to the Bible in Psalm 138 and verse 2? Here's one of the greatest statements about the Word of God ever written. Psalm 138 and verse 2. The psalmist said, “For thou hast magnified thy word above thy name.” You think of that. These people who think they need to critique the Bible. They think that the Bible needs to be re-examined. And some of them are called preachers. I personally think we need to re-examine those preachers. Jesus believed the Word of God. Jesus said, “Not a jot, not a tittle will fail from the law till all be fulfilled.” When you love the Bible that way, do you know what the liberals will call you? They'll say, “Well, he just worships the Bible. That's bibliolatry.” Friend, pay no attention to them. If the study of the Bible brings you closer to Jesus Christ and does not stand between you and Jesus Christ, if it causes you to love Jesus Christ more, just keep reading it and keep believing it, for Jesus said, “Search the Scriptures. These are they which testify of me.”

E. The Bible Is the End Time Book

Yes, it is the every time book. And I want to say it is the end time book. Look in verse 144. Look at it. “Thy, the righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” Look, if you will, in verse 160: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth forever.” The Word of God will be here, ha, ha, when everything else is gone. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word will not pass away,” our Lord says. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.”

You think of the history of this old world. Empires have risen and fallen. Civilizations have come and gone and changed. Nations have perished from creation to cremation, but the Word of God is here. Emperors have decreed the extermination of the Bible, but the emperors are gone, the Bible is here. Atheists have railed at the Bible. They die and go to hell; the Bible stands. Agnostics have smiled cynically at the Bible, yet it stands. The modernists and the liberals have moved heaven and earth to take the miracles out of the Word of God, and yet it stands. The materialists and the secularists and the humanists have ignored the Bible, and still it stands. Radicals have ranted and raved, and yet the Bible stands. And the former pastor of this church, the late, great Dr. Robert G. Lee, said this, and I quote. “All its enemies have not torn one hole in its holy vesture, nor stolen one flower from its wonderful garden, nor delight, nor diluted one drop of honey from its abundant hive, nor broken one string of its 1,000-stringed harp, or drowned one sweet word in infidel ink.”

Now, how are you going to study this book? If this book is the old time book, the new time book, the any time book, the every time book, the end time book, the all time book, if it is, if it is the book of the ages, how are you, an average person, going to study the Bible and let God’s Word speak to you? Let me give you some things. Jot these down.

I. You Must Pray over the Bible

First of all, you must pray over the Bible. This is the reason for a quiet time. You must pray over the Bible. You say, “Pastor Rogers, what should I pray?” Well, look in verse 12, if you will. “Blessed art thou, O LORD; teach me thy statutes.”

There was a man who was a Bible teacher. I believe his name was Harry. And Harry was discipling this man and teaching him the Bible and teaching him the Bible. One day, Harry wasn’t there and the man was studying the Scriptures. And he said, “O I wish Harry were here. Lord, I wish Harry were here.” The Lord said, “Why don’t you ask Me. I taught Harry.” Now, friend, you can ask the Lord. You can say, “God, teach me.” Really, the Bible says you have no need that anyone teach you. You have an unction from the Father, from the Holy One. The Lord becomes your teacher. Look, if you will, in verse 18. Here’s what you pray. “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things in

thy law.” That tells me that you can read the Bible with closed eyes and not see it. You must ask God to open your eyes.

You remember when Jesus was walking with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection in Luke chapter 24? He was walking with them, and they began to discuss the Scriptures. And the Bible says there that then He opened their understanding. Oh, you need to pray that. “Lord God, open my understanding,” for the Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 14: “For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.”

This book is not like any other book. This book is alive! It is quick, *zao*, *energes*. It is powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword. As you read the Bible, you must pray this prayer: “Oh Lord, teach my thy statutes. Open thy mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” And if you do that, you know what will happen? Look in verse 36: “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies....” God will begin to give you a love for the Bible. He will incline your heart to the Word of God and He will open your eyes. Look in verse 73 of this same chapter. “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.” Don’t you want God to do that for you? Don’t you want God to give you a love for the Bible? Don’t you want God to open your eyes? Don’t you want God to give you understanding? Rule number one: You must pray over it.

Now, you see, there are three words that are important – revelation, inspiration, and illumination. Revelation is God revealing truth. Inspiration is man writing down the truth. But illumination is your understanding the truth. And the same God that revealed the truth and inspired the truth is the God who has to illumine the truth to you. Okay? Got it? Step number one: You pray over it.

II. You Must Ponder the Bible

Step number two: You ponder it. You ponder it. Now look, if you will, in verse 15. Pondering is really meditation. Look at it. “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.” That is, I think about it. I don’t read it casually or lightly. Look in verse 23: “Princes did also sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” Look, if you will, in verse 97: “O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Now, you need, therefore, to ponder the Word of God, to spend time thinking about it. Now, this is not easy. If you’re looking for a quick fix and an easy way to learn the Scripture, you can’t do it. There, there’s a price to pay. Look, if you will, in, in verse 127: “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.” I wonder how many people in this building could say that, “The Word of God means more to me than gold.” I mean, if you knew ev, a place every morning you could go and get some

gold, would you go? I mean, if, if there's a place where you go and get some gold; I mean, just put it down, would you go? I think you would. You see, the truth of the matter is that material things mean more to most of us than the Word of God. And that's the reason that we really, ah, we won't pay the price to ponder it. Look, if you will, in verse 147: "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried and hoped in thy word." Do you know what that means? It means I got up early to study the Bible. Look, if you will, in verse 148: "Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word." What does that mean? It means that he took time for the Word of God. Conviction time. How many of you believe everything you read in the newspaper? Let me see your hand. How many of you believe everything in the Bible is true that God has revealed? Let me see your hand. I'm not going to ask the last question. How many people spend more time with the newspaper than you do with the Word of God? That's conviction time, isn't it? You see, we say we don't have time, but the truth of the matter is that we need to make time. That's what the psalmist is saying. He said, "I made time. I made time. I, I got up to have time to be alone with God." Look, if you will, in verse 148 of this same chapter. "Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word." So more than money or more than sleep, the psalmist said, thy word is important. So, as you set aside this time in the morning or in the evening or both, as you begin to think about the Word of God, as you meditate on the Word of God, then you need to use the common God-given sense that God has given you. If you were reading a novel, you wouldn't start in the middle of the novel and say, "It doesn't make sense to me." You would, at least, begin at the beginning and read it sequentially. Study the Word of God that way. I mean, at least, be kind enough to the Bible to use common sense. When you read the Bible, understand that it is full of literary devices, like any book. So treat poetry as poetry. Prose as prose. Prophecy as prophecy. Parable as parable. Proverb and proverb. Precept as precept. Rightly divide the Word of God.

You say, "Do you take the Bible literally or symbolically?" Yes! If it's literal prose, you take that literally. If it's symbolism, let it be symbolism. You see, even the symbolism is to be taken seriously and literally. If the Bible calls Satan a dragon, a great, red dragon, that's a symbol. That's an emblem. He's not a literal dragon that sweeps a third of the stars from the skies with his tail. ha That's not literal. That's symbolic. But because that is a symbol, does that mean there's not literally a devil? Of course there is a literal devil. Symbolism in the Bible doesn't do away with literal belief and what the symbol stands for. The Bible is full of metaphors. The Bible is full of figures, symbols. Somebody says, "Well, it means what it says and says what it means." It actually says what it says and means what it means. You think about that. It says what it says and it means what it means.

Give the Bible credit. Don't try to force meaning into the Bible. Any passage of

Scripture has but O-N-E, one meaning, not two, not three, but one. It means what it means, nothing more and nothing less, but it has thousands of applications. Now learn the difference. Find out what it literally means and then you can apply it everywhere.

Now let me give you the six great questions. I picked one of our church member's Bibles and I looked in there and he'd written these down, and I was so pleased. I had them in the flyleaf of my Bible a long time ago. If you've not gotten these from me yet, I want you to get these six great questions. And if you prayerfully come to the Bible with a clean heart, a teachable spirit, and you ask these six great questions, the Bible will speak to you.

Question number one: Is there a promise to claim? When you find a promise in the Word of God, that is not to tack on the refrigerator door. It's to carry it to the bank and cash it. Is there a promise to claim?

Second question: Is there a lesson to learn? Have you ever just read a passage of Scripture and said, "Now what can I learn from that?" Is there a lesson to learn?

Thirdly: Is there a blessing to enjoy? Oh, if you get in the Word of God, before long God will bless you. I was reading a psalm the other day. I got so excited. I mean, I just had to stop and praise God, lift my hands to God in praise to enjoy that psalm that spoke of the enthronement of our dear Savior when He comes.

Fourthly: Is there a command to obey? Many of us like to recite the promises without obeying the commands. As you read the Bible, our Lord will give you commands. Ask yourself, is there a command for me to obey?

Next: Is there a sin to avoid? Is there a warning there?

Lastly, and this sums up anything not mentioned: Is there a new thought to carry with me?

Now those questions are so simple. But you can take almost any passage of Scripture and ask those questions and come away with a sermon or a Sunday school lesson or anything else just right there. That's the reason that when you go to study the Bible and you have prayed over it and you ponder it, you come with a journal. You come with something to write on. You come with a pen or a pencil. It's almost impossible for me to read without searching for a pen or pencil. I just wouldn't think of it. I wouldn't think, I, I have to have something in my hand when I'm reading to underline with and to write down. What if God gives you something good? Don't you want to remember it? Do you expect Him to give you anything good? Well, then, don't you think you ought to write it down if God gives you a promise a claim, a lesson to learn, a blessing to enjoy, a command to obey, a sin to avoid, or a new thought, write it down! The weakest ink is better than the best memory. You say, "O, I'll never forget that." Ha!

Now you ponder it. You meditate on it. Now let's look at it from another perspective. Here are the questions you ask again from another perspective. You ask who? What?

When? Where? And why? You'll be amazed. Who? What? When? Where? Why? Just ask those questions.

Who is this about? Well, you say, "I don't know who this is." All right, good. Get you a Bible dictionary and get you an atlas. [Curtis ought to give me—ah, he ought to give me some thanks for what I'm about to tell them right now.] Just get you a Bible dictionary, get you an atlas, and get you a concordance. A dictionary for Bible words. An atlas to help you with the geography. Spend a little time. You don't have to say, "I'm going to read a mile a minute." I can spend hours on one verse, hours on one verse. Don't try to go so fast. Slow down. Taste what God is saying. Who? What? Why? When? Where? Ask yourself these questions. Ponder the Word of God. Meditate on it.

Let me give it to you from another perspective. Here are the steps, six of them. Read it through. Think it clear. Write it down. Pray it in. Live it out. Pass it on, and it's yours. I'll give you those again. All right. Read it through. Think it clear. Write it down. Pray it in. Live it out. Pass it on. Read it through. Think it clear. Write it down. Pray it in. Live it out. Pass it on.

Now, I've given you three different ways just to comment on a passage of Scripture. All of this under the heading of Pondering the Word of God.

Now, you say, "Pastor Rogers, I'm just not the student type." Friend, we learn what we want to learn. I, I've been on the airplanes, and that stewardess gets up there and goes through that little speech. People are reading the sports page, paying no attention. They've heard that thousands of times. She says, "There's a little card there that tells you all about this airplane and the safety features of this airplane." But, boy, you get in stormy weather and out comes those cards. Boy, they tend to read those things and they, they really begin to listen. It's, it's a matter of motivation, that's your problem. Friend, when you desire the Word of God more than you desire gold. You say, "I can't remember. You can't teach an old dog new tricks." If you got a hundred dollars for every verse you memorized, you'd turn into a machine. That's right. That's right. It is a matter of motivation. And the motivation comes out of your respect to the Word of God, what you really believe about the Word of God.

III. You Must Practice the Bible

All right. Step number one: You must pray over it. Step number two: You must ponder it. Step number three: You must practice it. Look, if you will, in 167: "My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly. I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee." Now, our generation likes to recite the promises without obeying the commandments. I told you this morning there's no reason that God should give you more light until you live up to the light that you already have. the part that you do understand. And, I don't have time to develop that, and I already spoke

about it this morning. But you must ponder it. You must pray over it. You must ponder it. You must practice it.

IV. You Must Proclaim the Bible

Fourthly, fourthly: You must proclaim it. Here's one of the great secrets. O, one of the most incredible secrets of learning the Word of God, and that is, giving it away. Look, if you will, in verse 13 of this psalm. "With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth." Look, if you will, in verse 27: "Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: and so shall I talk of thy wondrous works." Look, if you will, in verse 46: "I will speak of thy testimony, thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed." As I was looking at this verse this afternoon, I thought, God has been so good to me. I've gotten to share the Word of God with four Presidents of the United States of America. And I thought, I'm so glad that I had something to say from God, from God, not to be ashamed of the Word of God. Look, if you will, in verse 172 of this wonderful psalm. "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteous."

Now, listen. The more of God's Word that gets into you and that you give to other people the more comes back to you. There's just something wonderful about sharing the Word of God. You want the Bible to be real to you? Give it to other people. You know one of the blessings of the thing that God has called me to do? I get to preach the Word of God. And the more I preach it, the more I love it. And the more I love it, the more I preach it. The more I preach it, the more I love it. And it just sticks to me the more I give it to you. I am so blessed. I am so blessed. People say, "Pastor, how do you remember things?" I tell them, I tell them. Sometimes I'm known for remembering silly things because I tell silly things too. I like to hear them and I like to tell them. I like humor. I hear it. If I think it's funny, I like to see you think it's funny, so I'll tell you about it. If I think it's interesting, I like to tell you about it. But, O, how I love to declare the Word of God.

Conclusion

Now, what I've told you tonight is so simple I'm almost ashamed to tell you. And yet, it is so wonderful I dare not fail to tell you. If you'll take the Word of God, if you will pray over it, if you will ponder it, if you will practice it, and if you'll proclaim it, the Bible will become to you the book of the ages.

Father, seal the word to our hearts tonight. Thank You for letting us be here to study Your holy word. And, Lord, I pray tonight for those who are not saved that they might come to know Jesus. Now, with heads bowed and eyes closed, I want to give you five great questions out of the Bible. Heads are bowed. These questions come to you.

Question number one: "What should it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world

and lose his own soul.” Friend, have you ever thought about losing your soul?

Question number two: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” My friend, you will not escape.

Question number three: “What must I do to be saved?” The answer is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

Question number four: “What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?” Confess Him as your Lord and Savior and follow Him.

Question number five: “How long halt ye between two opinions? The answer, I trust, is, “Pastor, I will not halt any longer. I am openly and publicly giving my heart to Jesus. Father, I pray that this will be true. In Your holy name, amen.

How to Control Your Thought Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 4, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:9

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”*

PSALMS 119:9

Outline

Introduction

- I. There Must Be Purification
- II. There Must Be Determination
- III. There Must Be Fortification
 - A. Memorize the Word of God
 - B. Personalize the Word of God
 - C. Verbalize the Word of God
 - D. Vitalize the Word of God
 - E. Internalize the Word of God

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and turn to the book of Psalms, the heart of the Bible, and Psalm 119, which is the great psalm on the Word of God. And in a moment we’re going to begin reading in verse 9. The subject tonight is on, “How to Control Your Thought Life.” And you know that we live in a world that has gone wild. And the problem, primarily, is the thought life. If you’ll think back when God destroyed the first civilization with the flood, the reason that He did was because of the thought life. The thoughts of men’s hearts, the imagination of men’s hearts was evil continually before the Lord.

Sometime back, *U.S. News and World Report* had an alarming issue. As a matter of fact, I, I saved the issue. On the front of that issue was a picture of a youngster. He looked like he was in his early teens, maybe thirteen. He’s in his blue jeans. He has a pullover tee-shirt. He has a tape player, and he has ear phones on, and the caption asked this question: This is on the front cover. Do you know what your children are listening to? Now this is not in a religious journal; this is U.S. News and World Report. And here’s some of the things that that article said in this secular magazine.

“Day and night, America’s youth are enticed by electronic visions of a world so

violent, sensual, and narcotic that childhood itself seems to be under siege. The pleasures pervade to the young today through records, television, videos, and films are so provocative that parents are in an uproar. Psychologists are warning of dire consequences. Entertainment producers are fearful of threats of free speech, and politicians are pondering solutions that question first amendment rights.” Bottom line: They say, “We’ve got a problem we don’t know what to do with it.” Then the article goes on to say, “Violence, the occult, sadism, masochism, rebellion, drug abuse, promiscuity, homosexuality are constant themes.” Now that means that over and over and over again your young people—our young people—are being bombarded by these things. The article goes on to say that, “Meanwhile, studies show that teenagers listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the seventh and twelfth grades. That’s 500 hours less than the total time they spend in school over twelve years.” And listen to this statistic again. “They estimate that the average teenager listens to 10,500 hours of rock music just between the seventh and twelfth grades, only 5,500 hours less than they spend in all of school over the twelve year period.” And remember what these themes are over and over and over again.

Now, Satan is very sinister, very clever, diabolically wicked, and he wants to capture the hearts and minds of an entire generation. And, by and large, he has done it. The mind is a valued prize over which a battle is being waged. And why? Obvious. When he has your mind, he has you!

Proverbs 20, Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23: “Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Now when the Bible uses the word heart, it does not mean the organ that pumps your blood. It literally means your thought life, your mind, a core of the individual. “Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Proverbs 23, verse 7: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” One philosopher said, “Let me compose the songs a nation sings, and I don’t care who makes its laws.” That is, it is music that has this powerful force. But then set music to pornographic images, such as MTV, and there you have Satan beginning to build a system, a web that will destroy the minds of young people, and has and is destroying the minds of adults as well.

Now let me say this before I get into this message on how to control your thought life. Your mind is not your brain. Your mind is not your brain. Your brain is to your mind what that piano is to a piano player. And the brain is what your mind thinks with. Now some of us only have a spinet and some have a grand piano. Some of us don’t have as good an instrument as others. But if you have a very powerful brain and a very wicked mind, do you see what a combination that is? Do you see what a person with a bad mind and a good brain would turn out? He becomes a clever devil, a more dangerous thing.

Now the Bible makes it very clear that is the mind that must be controlled. Again, Romans chapter 8, verses 6 and 7. We're going to get back to our text in just a moment, but I'm just trying to set the stage and tell you that the mind is the instrument that we need to deal with. Romans 8, verses 6 and 7: "For to be carnally minded is death..." The word *carnal* means "fleshly minded." A carnivorous animal is a flesh-eating animal. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal, or the fleshly, mind is enmity against God: for it, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And then Colossians 1, verse 21: "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works; yet now hath he reconciled." And, again, Jesus said – and Joyce and I were talking about this verse today at home – ah, Luke 13:3: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." And what does the word *repent* mean? *Metanoeo*. It means "a change of mind." That's what repentance is.

Now let me give you three steps out of this passage of Scripture that we've looked at that will help you in this day when your mind is being bombarded, in order to have a pure thought life, and it is possible.

They asked a little boy to finish this quotation: Cleanliness is next to _____, and he finished it this way: cleanliness is next to impossible.

Well, that's not true. It is possible. You can have a clean thought life. You can live victoriously. But not by isolation, not anymore. And our young people today are becoming road kill on the information superhighway. I mean, the things that are in cyberspace now, the filth that's coming over the computer Internet and these things, it's vile. How are you going to capture the thought life? We still have some people today who tell us, "Well, television – that radio, music, that doesn't affect the lives of our young people." And you know who's been saying that? The liberal crowd. "Oh, that doesn't bother them." All this filth and this pornography, the free-speech crowd. And now some of that same crowd are saying, "You know what these people are saying on these radio talk shows, that's just changing what everybody is doing," and they're talking about all of this information that's coming on these radio talk shows and how that's controlling America. You can't have it both ways. I'm not trying to take the side of somebody on a radio talk show who advocates violence. I'm totally against that. I'm just saying that me thinks some people are a little hypercritical when they talk out of both sides of their mouths. Of course we know what people see and hear affects them. Of course it does. Or else why would people advertise? They advertise. Why do they spend millions of dollars on advertising? Why will someone spend a million dollars for a Super Bowl ad that only lasts a minute or less? Because what people see affects them, and they know that it'll cause people to buy their product, whatever it is.

Well, here are three steps:

I. There Must Be Purification

Number one: There must be the purification of the mind. Your mind has got to get clean to begin with. Look in verse 9: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” Now, first of all, you have got to get your mind clean. You’ve got to get a starting place.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” God asks the question, and then God answers the question. “...by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Now look at the word *way* if you will. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” The word *way* has the idea of a groove, a rut, a track. You see, Satan gets a groove in your mind. Satan gets a way, a track in your mind. You get a one-track mind, a rutty rut, a muddy rut in your mind.

Have you ever been around people – I used to do construction work, working my way through college and seminary – been around a lot of construction workers. I’ve been around men, no matter what anybody would say, they would turn it to something dirty, something filthy, make a dirty joke out of almost everything. Have you been around people like that? Do you know people like that? Anything you do, they can turn it and make it. They just have a rut in their mind. They have a one-track, dirty mind. And that’s what he’s talking about. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” This groove that’s in his mind, how’s he going to get rid of this thing? It’s sort of what I would call a secret addiction. Now there is that mind thought, that way that people think.

And then look at the word *cleanse*. How is a man going to be cleansed? How are you going to get your mind clean to begin with? “...by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” The Word of God is the cleansing agent. Jesus said in John 15, verse 3: “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” And the word He uses to *clean* is the word we get our word catharsis from. You know what a catharsis is? It just cleans you out on the inside. The Word of God is a catharsis. The Word of God can cleanse your mind. You let the cleansing tides of Calvary and the freshening breezes of the Holy Spirit blow through you, wash through you and cleanse you by the Word. The Bible speaks of the washing of water by the Word.

Well, how does the Word cleanse us? Well, it points us to confession and repentance. First John 1:9: “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us...” I want you just to get a mental image of Jesus Christ, on the authority of the Word of God, coming into your heart, into your life, and just doing spring housecleaning.

The other day, Joyce and I got out in the garage. She said, “Adrian, we’ve got to clean out the utility room.” Oh, no. It was Memorial Day. That’s supposed to be a fun day. “We’ve got to clean out the utility room.” And we said, “Now this we’ll save, this we’ll pitch, this we’ll give away.”

Have you ever done that? Well, what an experience that is! Well, just picture the

Lord Jesus doing that in your mind. Just say, “Come on in, Lord. Throw this out. Get rid of that. And tell me what to keep.” He will do that. The Lord Jesus needs to do just spring cleaning in your heart and in your mind. And listen to me. I don’t care what your thought life has been. I don’t care what you’ve been reading. I care not what you’ve been watching or what you have been thinking or what kind of a rut there is. Tonight, before you go to bed, your mind can be as clean as the driven snow. Now you have to learn that. Don’t ever get the idea that it’s too late for you or that you can’t get your heart and your mind clean. It can be absolutely cleansed.

One time I was in another city. I was walking down the street, and I walked past one of these houses, these adult—they call them adult. It’s really for infantile people—one of these porno palaces, purveyors of filth. And there in the window of that thing there was something that was so gross and so vile, and my eyes fell on it. It was like a wound; I mean, literally like a wound in me, like a wound. I felt bad. I went up to the room, got on my knees, and I said, “Lord, You need to just heal my mind. You need just to cleanse my mind. And I just accept Your cleansing.” And He did, He did. The Lord can purge and cleanse. Jesus said, “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” God will do a catharsis. Now that’s so very important that, in order to maintain a clean thought life, that you start. You’ve got to come to a place where you start and get cleansed.

II. There Must Be Determination

Now here’s the second thing: Not only after there comes that cleansing – that’s step number one – and that is purification. After that comes determination. Sorry about that. But if you’re looking for a cheap way, an easy way, I can’t give it to you. But now look in verse 10: “With my whole heart have I sought thee O let me not wander from thy commandments.” If you don’t mean business about this thing, you’re not going to win. I mean, if it’s not worth it to you to have a clean thought life, if you’re half-hearted about it, forget it! There is no way possible that you’re going to have victory in this area until you have a whole-hearted victory till you make up your mind that with every inch, every ounce, every nerve, every fiber, every sinew, every corpuscle of your being you will say, “Dear God, I will to be true.”

Do you know the scourge of the 20th Century? It is half-hearted Christians. They want to serve God and dabble in the world. There is a battle for your mind. And if you’re half-hearted, you will lose it. Let me give you some Scripture.

James 1, verse 8: “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

James 4, verse 8: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.” A double-minded man is unstable. Do you want God? Do you want purity of heart? Do you want purity of heart?

If you don't, my preaching is absolutely in vain. It will fall off your back like water off a duck's back.

Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 29: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." And the soul means the mind, the emotion, and the will.

Number one: Get clean. Purification. Number two: Determine to stay clean. Get it settled. Job said in Job 31, verse 1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes not to look upon a maid." If you don't make a decision, nobody will make it for you. God can't force Himself upon you.

Forty years ago, or longer, I read about an ermine. You know, the ladies wear these ermine coats. The ermine has a snow-white coat. I learned the way that they trap the ermine or catch the ermine; at least they did according to the story that I read. They would find the hole in the ground where the ermine would run to hide when the ermine would be chased by the dogs. And they'd find that hole, know that if the dogs began to chase the ermine, that he'd run for the hole and burrow underground and they couldn't get him out. So they would smear filth around the door of that ermine's house, around the parameter of that hole. They would take crude filth and smear it around that entrance. And when the ermine would run, being chased by the dogs, he'd come to that place and see that and know that he would defile his snow-white coat if he went in there. He would turn around and face the dogs and die rather than to defile himself. That's the kind of determination you're going to have, sir. I mean, you say, "Look, I will be pure." Now if you don't say that, I mean, if you don't make it totally in your heart and in your mind, I don't know any way possible you're going to stay clean and pure today. It used to be you had to sneak out around the barn to see things. You don't have to do that anymore. It's there. And if you don't have the determination, if you don't have the gyroscope on the inside, if you don't have the compass on the inside, if you don't have the policeman off the street corner and in your heart, if you have not made privately and personally a decision, you're going down!

First of all, get clean. Now it's so important that you get clean. Have you?

Let's talk about the utility room more. Do you know what was wrong with our utility room? I'll tell you what was wrong with our utility room. Now this is a confession. And Joyce says, "Adrian, you don't have to tell everything." But our utility room got in a particular state where we used to have it pretty neat. We had everything labeled in boxes and everything. But then one time the holidays came or whatever, and company was company. We started carrying stuff out there and stacking it in that utility room. And it stacked here and stacked here and stacked here. And then, after a while, we got where we'd open the door and throw stuff in. Ha, do you know what I mean? I mean it gets to a certain state. What difference does it make? Just put it in there and walk out

and shut the door.

Your mind will get that way. But when you get it all straight, and it's all clean, and everything, then you don't want to mess it up again. Isn't that right? Then you want to keep it that way. That's the reason you've got to get your mind clean so you can keep it that way. If you don't get it clean; I mean, if you don't have the assurance that it's clean, the devil will just throw anything in there and you'll accept it. So you've got to get it clean. And then there has to be that determination to keep it clean.

III. There Must Be Fortification

Now, first of all, purification. Secondly, determination. Now that's still not enough. That is still not enough. You can get clean and you can say, "By the grace of God and everything in me that is, I will keep my heart clean and pure," and you'll still fall if you fail on this third and most vital thing. Purification. Determination. And then fortification.

Look, if you will, now in verse 11: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Now he's not talking about past sin and being cleansed from it. He's talking about future temptation. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." It is the Word of God hidden in your heart that is the antidote, the bulwark, that keep the thoughts, the impure thoughts out. And it is that you're not being overcome with evil, but you're overcoming evil with good. You must saturate your being with the Word of God. *These hath God married and no man shall part; dust on the Bible and drought in the heart.* Now you say, "Pastor Rogers, I have a wonderful Bible. I bought it over here in the Bellevue bookstore." Wonderful. I'm glad you have. But do you read it? Do you memorize it? Do you apply it? Is it real to you? A dime and a gold nugget are of the same value to you personally if both of them are lying on the bottom of the ocean floor. What good is all of the treasure in this Word of God if it's not taken and used? I mean, it can be there like a gold nugget, but somehow you have to get this into your heart and in your mind.

How does the Bible keep us pure? Look again in verse 11: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." How does the Bible keep us pure? Well, God is a holy God. And when you read the Bible, understand the Bible, and apply the Bible, what you're doing is thinking God's thoughts after Him. Now put this verse in your margin: Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9. Paul is talking to the Philippian church and telling them how to live victoriously in hard times, and then this is what he says: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." You have to think on things that are true, that are honest, that are just, that are lovely, that are of good report, that are virtuous, and praise worthy.

Now I've told you many times from this pulpit that God in His infinite wisdom and great mercy created us where we cannot be thinking two thoughts at one time. Isn't that wonderful? So if we're thinking what is right, we cannot be thinking what is wrong. And, therefore, it is so important that you have the Word of God in your heart. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart; that I might not sin against thee." Because the Word of God, when it gets in your mind, it changes your attitude, and your attitude determines your actions. So, the devil will work on your mind to take you away from the Word of God and from purity. And, of course, the Holy Spirit leads you to the Word of God.

Now let me tell you how, in a very practical way, I want to tell you how to take the Word of God and make it real to you so tomorrow morning when you have your quiet time, you can get the Word of God down in your heart and in your life and go out to face the day in a way that will give you victory.

A. **Memorize the Word of God**

Number one: Begin to memorize the Word of God. I'm so grateful for this church and the Scripture Memory program of this church with our boys and girls. And, moms and dads of boys and girls, you ought to write those workers a note of appreciation. You ought to help them all you can, and you ought to thank God that you're a part of a church that puts the emphasis upon Scripture memory. But you, as adults, need to memorize the Word of God. And don't give me that phony baloney about the fact that you can't memorize, you're too old. You know why I don't believe that? Because if you got a thousand dollars for every verse you memorized, you'd turn into a machine memorizing verses. Right. You would. I mean, just suppose. You say, "Man, I get a thousand dollars. All I've got to do is memorize this verse." Would you memorize it? Of course! It's just a value system. So it's what you want to do.

Now he says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart..." Now what is hiding the word of God in your heart? That is memorizing the Word of God. Now it's got to be in your heart. It can't be in a drawer. It can't be in a trunk. You've got to get it in your heart. So, first of all, you memorize the Word of God. Now it's not enough to memorize it. You can memorize it and it still won't be powerful.

B. **Personalize the Word of God**

Number two: You have to personalize it. Look in verse 12: "Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes." Ask the Holy Spirit of God to take the word that you've hidden; as you memorize it, then ask the Holy Spirit of God to personalize it to you. You see, you cannot separate legitimately the Word of God and the God of that Word. And ask God to teach you what it means. Pray over it. Many, many times in my sermon preparation I just have to stop, lay down my pen, and say, "God, I don't understand this. Lord, teach me Your Word." Not what I'm supposed to be telling other people. Teach it

to me! Personalize it.

C. **Verbalize the Word of God**

Step number three: Verbalize it. Look in verse 13: “With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.” You want to put that other crowd on the run? When they get there with the *Playboy* magazine, you get there with the King James. I mean, come in there. Greet them in the morning, and say, “Good morning. Let me tell you what I saw in the Word this morning.” I don’t mean in a holier-than-thou way. I mean, just in a real, friendly, natural, normal way. Say, “You know, I was reading today. The Word of God had something to say about that,” and just begin to quote the Word of God and share the Word of God. And as you begin to verbalize the Word of God, there’s something about verbalizing it that is such a blessing. And, very frankly, God was good to me that He called me into the ministry because I get to verbalize God’s Word. And I’ve learned this about the Word of God. The more of it you give away, the more of it sticks to you. You know, people say, ‘Well, how do you remember something?’ Well, very frankly, I spend very, very, very little time; almost none at all, at rote memory. Most of my memorization of the Word of God comes through the usage of the Word of God. And as I use the Word of God, it somehow just sticks to me. As I verbalize it and personalize it, I memorize it. And I find myself knowing, Brother Joseph, passages of Scripture that I didn’t even try to memorize. I think all three of you men would agree that is true in our lives. *As we share the Word of God, it puts the devil on the defense. It puts us on the offense.* And I’ll tell you what else it does. Friend, it positions us. Once we let them know that we are bearers of the Word of God, then we know that we have positioned ourselves and it won’t be quite as easy to look at that thing or to say that thing that we ought not to say. Verbalize the Word of God.

This book is what the Bible calls the “word of our testimony.” You remember over there in the book of the Revelation? It speaks of the devil, and it says, “They overcame him by the word of their testimony....” The devil is working on your mind. Why don’t you do what Jesus did? Take the Word of God and work on the devil with it. I mean, run him through with the sword.

It is so important that you speak the Word of God. It is so important that you share the Word of God. It is so important that you sing the Word of God. I appreciate Jim Whitmire who leads us to put the Word of God into music. And most all the songs that we sing here someday, somehow put the Word of God on our lips.

All right. Now we’re talking about taking the Word of God as a weapon against Satan. Get your heart clean. Number two: you need to determine that it’s going to stay clean. Number three: you need to fortify yourself with the Word of God. Now, listen. You verbalize the Word of God.

D. **Vitalize the Word of God**

Number four: You vitalize it. Now look, if you will, in verse 14: “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.” Do you know why people get off into pornography, and they get off into deviant thought? And it doesn’t have to be pornography. It can be greed. It can be bitterness. It can be the occult. You know why? They haven’t found satisfaction. An impure mind is a mind that has not found its contentment in the Lord Jesus Christ. An impure mind is a mind that is looking for contentment somewhere else other than the right place. Now many Christians have not discovered the riches that they have in Jesus because they don’t know the Word of God. You see, the world loses its appeal to us, and the filth and the pornography loses its appeal if you have satisfaction. These people who are reading these filthy magazines, they, they’ve got a craving. They’ve got a satisfaction they’re trying to fill. Of course, they never fill it because once they get to a certain level of pornography, they want something more deviant, something more wild, something more wicked. And they’re having, the Bible says, “...eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin.” But the child of God, when he vitalizes the Word of God, when he rejoices in God’s testimonies, he has the deepest needs of his life met, and he literally feels sorry for these people feeding on this. He doesn’t say, “Oh, I can’t do that because I’m a Christian. I wish I could.” No! He, he doesn’t feel like a second-class person. Man, if you’ve just had a wonderful meal; I mean, a gourmet meal with all of the, the trimmings, and it’s wonderful, and you’ve eaten till you’re sufficiently satisfied, then you go outside and somebody offers you a plateful of stale crumbs on a dirty plate, you say, “No, thank you. I’m already satisfied.” Amen? You see, having found all in the Lord Jesus. What we need to do is not primarily to fight the world. “If any man love the world, it is because the love of the Father is not in him.” That doesn’t say the love of the world, the Father is not in him because he loves the world, but just the opposite. He loves the world because the love of the Father is not in him. Who is the love of the Father? Jesus. When you fill up with Jesus, then this world loses its appeal to you, and the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. And when you’ve just been feasting on Jesus, you don’t have to be in the back alley eating tin cans with the devil’s billygoats, because you can say, “No, thank you. I’m satisfied.”

And what you do is you memorize the Word of God. You personalize the Word of God. You verbalize the Word of God. You vitalize the Word of God. Make it real to you.

E. **Internalize the Word of God**

And last of all, if you would conquer your thought life, you must internalize the Word of God. Look, if you will, now in verse 15: “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.” Now this verse is the sum total of all the others as you internalize the Word of God. Now what does that mean? It’s a step beyond memorizing. It’s a step

beyond personalizing. It is a step beyond verbalizing. It is a step beyond vitalizing. It's meditation - internalizing the Word of God. Meditation is one of the great doctrines of the Word of God. Look in verse 15: "I will meditate..." Look, if you will, in verse 23: "Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes." Look, if you will, in verse 48 of this same psalm: "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes." Look, if you will, in verse 97 of this same psalm: "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day." Look in verse 99: "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation." Look, if you will, please, in verse 148: "Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word." Do you think God's trying to tell us something? We are to internalize the Word of God.

The idea of meditating on the Word of God, the Word of God becomes so real to you that it's like a tune that you can't get out of your mind. Have you ever found yourself going around all day long humming a tune? You get some little ditty in your mind, and you just hum it all day long. That's the way the Word of God is. And when you mediate on the Word of God, when the Word of God really gets in, gets down, and you begin to verbalize it and vitalize it and personalize it and memorize it, do you know what you become? You become what I want to call a second-nature Christian. Now what is a second-nature Christian?

Years ago, I bought a, a Volkswagen Beetle, a 1960 Volkswagen. They were hard to get. I bought one. That was a wonderful car. I loved that little automobile. And I drove it around on visitation and everything down in Florida. I was proud of that car. It absolutely seemed indestructible. I could not wear it out. But you shifted, you know, this way, and so forth. When I bought it, I'd had an automatic transmission in the other car. But I had this little Volkswagen. And at first it was fun gearing that thing, zrooom,zrooom. Of course, it wasn't a racing car like I'd like to have, but anyway I had a Volkswagen. And so, you know, you'd gear it down when you go around corners, and all these things. And, you're conscious of the fact you're shifting gears. When you have one of those cars several months, you're never conscious of the fact you're shifting gears. You don't even think about it. Arooom, arooom. You just do it. It is absolutely second nature. You just do it because you're used to doing it.

And do you know what? You don't have to constantly be saying, "I'm not going to watch pornography. I'm not going to think dirty thoughts. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to...." It becomes second nature when the Word of God gets into you. I mean, when the Word of God permeates you, when you begin to meditate on God's Word, believe me, then you become a second-nature Christian, which is your true nature, the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

And so, “Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his way?” How, in this day, when the sleuth gates of hell have been opened on us and it seems like a sewer has erupted in the land, how are you going to do it? “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

Purification: get clean. Determination: do it with your whole heart. Fortification: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Isn’t that a wonderful passage of Scripture? It really is.

Let’s bow our heads in prayer. If you’ve never received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, what I’ve said tonight applies to Christians. And you cannot vitalize the Word of God in your heart without knowing the author of that word. And so, if you’re not certain that you’re saved, tonight I want to help you to get that settled. And right where you are tonight, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, I want to lead you in a prayer where you tonight can ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and be your personal Savior and Lord. And I promise you tonight on the authority of His word that He will save you. You say, “Pastor Rogers, I’m not sure He would save me tonight because I don’t have the right feelings, or I’ve gone too far, or this thing or that thing,” whatever it is that you might use for an excuse. But I want to give you God’s Word. The Bible says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” There’s no equivocation, no fine print. Now if you’re not sincere, of course, He won’t save you. But if you sincerely want to be saved, He will save you tonight instantaneous, radically, dramatically, and eternally. He will save you if you’ll trust Him. So I want to lead you in a prayer. Now you may be a member of this church or some other church and not certain of your salvation. I want you to pray this prayer with me. Or you may be a member of no church, but you need to be saved. I want you to pray this prayer with me. Of course, every church member ought to be saved, but not all are. The devil had just as soon send you to hell from the pew as he had the gutter. As a matter of fact, he’d rather. So if you’re not certain of your salvation, I want you to pray like this: Now just pray it fervently in your heart. Dear God. That’s right, just speak Him. Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. And, friend, he really does. Jesus, You died to save me. You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You, Jesus. Now I want you to say that, but I want you to trust Him when you say it. I do trust You, Jesus. I do trust You, Jesus, right now, this moment, like a child I trust You to save me. I believe You’re the Son of God. I believe You paid my sin debt with Your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised You from the dead. And now I stake my eternal destiny on what You did, and I receive You by faith into my heart and into my life as my Lord and Master. I am sick of my sin. I’m tired of my sin. I repent of my sin. I turn from my sin and I yield everything to you, Lord Jesus. Begin now to make me the

person You want me to be. Thank You for saving me. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I just stand on Your word. You promised and You cannot lie. Thank You for saving me. And then I want you to pray this: And now, Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You. And, Lord Jesus, I will confess You openly and publicly as my Lord and Savior. Now this is very important that you pray this. Lord Jesus, I will confess You openly and publicly. I will not be ashamed of You, because You died for me. Give me the courage to make this public and to follow You openly. In Your name I pray, amen.

Now the reason I put that last part in that prayer is this: Jesus said, "If you confess me before me, I'll confess you before my Father." Jesus said, "If you deny me before men, I'll deny you before my Father." It's not the confession that brings salvation. It's the confession that shows salvation. The Bible teaches that when we believe on Him, we won't be ashamed of Him. *And the faith that will not lead to confession will not lead to heaven.* That's the reason we ask you to come and make it public that you've trusted Christ. Now there are many ways to confess Him, but one of the best ways I know is just what we're doing right now. We're going to sing an invitational hymn. And a minister will be standing at the head of each of these aisles. And I'm going to ask you to leave your seat and come forward and just tell that minister, "I am trusting Jesus." And your coming forward will be your way of saying to all the people here, "Look, I'm trusting Jesus." And, of course, we'll want to make an appointment for your baptism and baptize you as a believer in Jesus Christ, which is your real profession of faith in Christ, your baptism. But you have to come and present yourself for baptism so we can know that you've trusted Christ and baptize you as a New Testament church and add you to the fellowship of this church.

Guard Your Heart

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 18, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:9–16

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”*

PSALMS 119:9

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Principle of Purification
- II. The Principle of Determination
- III. The Principle of Fortification
 - A. The Reliance Test
 - B. The Respect Test
 - C. The Readiness Test
 - D. The Reverence Test
 - E. The Relationship Test
 - F. The Refinement Test
- IV. The Principle of Vitalization
- V. The Principle of Verbalization
 - A. Give Your Testimony to Others
 - B. Give Your Testimony to Yourself
 - C. Give Your Testimony to the Devil
- VI. The Principle of Evaluation
- VII. The Principle of Meditation

Conclusion

Introduction

Thank you, gentlemen. That was magnificent. Would you take God’s Holy Word and find Psalm 119? As you’re finding it, look up here.

A newspaper told, not so very long ago, about the keepers of Sea World in Orlando. When they opened up the park, there in the pool, where the killer whale Tilikum was, they found the body of a boy nude. His bathing suit was in another place. Evidently, this youngster had stayed in the park, and after the park closed, he decided he would go swimming with the whales. In that pool was a whale named Tilikum—11,000 pounds. When they came in the next morning, Tilikum was playing with the body of that boy—the nude body. Evidently, he thought that he could have a good time, maybe a little fun,

just swimming with the whales. Our kids today are being destroyed by a monster more dangerous than that black and white orca, that killer whale.

So great, so big, so massive is the problem, and yet, sometimes so seemingly small. There is a marine parasite very small—almost invisible—that feeds on the shell of a clam and paralyzes the muscle of that clam so it cannot stay shut. And then, that little parasite goes on the inside and begins to feed on the animal itself. Whether a killer whale or whether a tiny parasite feeding on the mind, destroying the resistance, our boys and girls today are in greater danger than boys and girls on the wild frontier many days ago. And, there is danger everywhere, and we need to do something about it, because Satan wants to corrupt their minds.

The Bible has so much to say about the mind. Sometimes, in the Old Testament, it's called "the heart." Just jot the scriptures down; don't look them up. We don't have time. Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23: "*Keep*"—that means "guard"—"*[Guard your] heart with all diligence; for out of it*"—"out of your heart"—"*are the issues of life*" (Proverbs 4:23). Proverbs chapter 23, verse 7: "*As [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). A business motto said this: "You're not what you think you are, but what you think—you are." "*As [a man] thinketh...so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). Paul said in Romans chapter 8 and verse 6: "*to be carnally minded is death*" (Romans 8:6). Colossians 1:21 says, "*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.*" Proverbs 15, verse 26: "*The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD*" (Proverbs 15:26).

Just keep those verses in mind. In a moment, we're going to come to our text in Psalm 119. But, it saddens me to say that pornography is not something that you see any longer or pick up in a back alley somewhere; it has gone mainstream. As I've said before, a tidal wave of sludge has hit the shores of these God-blessed Americas that we have today. And, we need to do something. We need to be able to guard our mind so that we can protect our home.

And, people have done all kinds of things to see if they can correct the thought life. They have searched in caves. They've walked in deserts. They've gone to remote islands, in the jungles—they've lived in the jungles. They've climbed mountains. They've tied themselves up in dungeons. They have lived as hermits. But, they have not been able to control the thought life. But, there is a way, and I can tell you it works—it works for me. And, listen to me carefully: I will guarantee you—guarantee you—beyond any shadow of a doubt or peradventure if you will do what these verses that I'm about to share with you tell you to do, you will guard your heart. And, if you guard your heart, then you are prepared to protect your home. If you're a father, how you need to listen! If you're a mother, you need to pay attention. If you're a teen or a preteen, don't tune me out.

I want to give you seven steps for a clean thought life. They're going to come right here from Psalm 119, and let me begin reading now with verse 9: *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all...judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word"* (Psalm 119:9–16).

Comprised in these verses, 9 to 16, are seven steps. And, I tell you with authority, I tell you with emphasis, I tell you with clarity, without stutter, without stammer, that if you will do the seven things that are listed here, you will, by God's grace, for His glory and your good, control your thought life. I want to say, contrariwise, if you don't do these things, no matter how well your tensions—your intentions—you're going to fail. There are seven principles.

I. The Principle of Purification

Principle number one: the principle of purification. Get perfectly clean. Start there. Notice in verse 9: *"Wherewithal shall a man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word"* (Psalm 119:9). Now, look at the word way. The Hebrew word there has the idea of a rut, a groove. It's something like a groove in a road, a muddy rut.

A farmer may drive his tractor back and forth over a farm road until...after a while, there is a rut in that road—a muddy rut. And, he can just set the tractor and let go of the wheel, and the tractor will follow that way. Now, what the devil has done to so many people is this: he has put a groove in their mind. He has put a muddy rut, a dirty track, in their mind. They have what I might call a "one-track mind."

Have you ever been around people that, no matter what you say, they're going to make something suggestive out of it—they're going to make some wise crack? If you've ever worked on a job, especially...well, not any particular kind of job. I used to work, as a kid, on construction work, and I'd given my heart to Christ. My heart was grieved with the men that I worked with. Every thing that somebody would say somebody else would make some something dirty out of it, something obscene out of it, something suggestive out of it. Why? Because these people had a rut in their mind; they had a dirty mind.

When you think of a way, just think somehow of a secret addiction. Many people have this. Jeremiah 11, verse 8 says, *"Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear... [they] walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart"—"the imagination of their evil heart"* (Jeremiah 11:8). That's what we would call a "dirty mind." Even at nighttime, before they go to sleep, lying on their bed, rather than thinking of God, rather than

thinking of the Word of God, they're playing dirty scenes across the theater of their mind, and God knows their thoughts.

Here's what the Bible says in Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 and following: Jesus is speaking—He said, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matthew 5:27–28)—mental adultery. So, “wherewithal shall a man cleanse that dirty rut, that groove, that internal addiction?” (Psalm 119:9). Well, look at another word there: “How can a man cleanse his way?” (Psalm 119:9). The word *cleanse* is the word that we get our word *catharsis* from. *Kathairō*—that's the Greek word. How can you have a catharsis? And, Jesus uses that word *catharsis* in John 15, verse 3: *“Now [you] are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you”* (John 15:3).

Think of the Lord Jesus Christ coming into your mind and doing Spring housecleaning. Think of Him just cleaning out everything in your mind that is not what it ought to be. Now, He will do that. The Bible says in 1 John 1:9: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us”*—now, listen to this—*“from all unrighteousness.”* You want some good news? No matter what your thought life has been—no matter how vile, no matter how obscene—tonight you can be as clean as pure as the driven snow. Listen: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us”*—not from some, but—*“from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Think of the Lord Jesus Christ just making you, tonight, perfectly, completely, totally clean.

Now, let's look at that word in 1 John 1:9: *“If we confess...”* It's a Greek word, *homologeō*. And, as I've told you before, it's a combination of two words that literally mean “to say the same”: *homo*—“the same”; *logo*—“to speak”—“to speak the same thing.” A confession of sin is not an admission of sin. It may be in a courtroom, but it is not before God. It is not just merely saying, “I have done thus-and-such,” but it means that “I agree with You, God. I come over and take sides against this sin. I say with You, dear God, that I've done it, and it is wrong. And, I say with You, God, what You say about that sin.” That is a confession. Once you make that confession, I'm telling you that Almighty God is faithful and just to forgive you and to cleanse you.

Now, if all God does is to forgive you, and doesn't cleanse you, then that—that—is not enough, because the problem would still be on the inside. But, I'm telling you that if God does not forgive you and God does not cleanse you, according to His own Word, God would be unfaithful, and God would be unjust. God would be a liar and a criminal, He would be unfaithful, He would be unjust—if He didn't cleanse you. That's the reason I'm so grateful to tell you tonight—listen to me: no matter what has been in your mind, no matter what kind of a rut is there, *“wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”*

by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). It’s in the Word of God that you’re going to find this cleansing. Jesus said in John 15, verse 3: “[you’re] clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

And so, that’s the very first thing that I want you to do. If you would have victory, that’s the very first step: you’re going to have to get your mind clean. And, there’s no reason you don’t do that—I mean, none at all. You can do it. There is no reason that you cannot do that. You may not do it, but you can do it. And, get your mind perfectly clean—not just the sin of wrong thinking, but any thing that is there, because if there is any sin there—any whatsoever—that’s un-confessed, un-repented-of, you’re not going to have victory. If you don’t have victory in one area, you can’t have it in another area. You can’t have segmented victory. *“If we confess our sins”—not our sin; our sins—“he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

When I was a boy preacher, I used to pastor in Fellsmere, Florida. There’s a sugar mill there. I would go out and witness to the men at the sugar mill—a little sugar mill town. They had a big garage there where they fixed the tractors and the equipment. One of the members of my church ran that big garage machine shop and so forth. I went out to see him, and you wouldn’t think that a machine could be that clean. The floors were clean and slick. There was no trash, nothing around. There was no grease. Everything was clean. The tools were all put up in a certain place. And, I looked at that place, and I stood in awe of how clean it was, because it was a machine shop. Then, I noticed something unusual: that man had painted every corner of that machine shop snow white. That corner was snow white. That corner was snow white. That corner was snow white, and that corner was snow white. I asked him about it. I said, “Why are the corners white?” He said, “I found out, if you keep the corners white, you can keep the rest of the shop clean.” He wouldn’t allow anybody to put anything in a corner. Every corner was snow white. Keep the corners of your mind clean. Don’t just try to clean up the main part. Keep it all perfectly clean. And, the smallest thing—let God make you perfectly clean.

I want to ask you a question: Do you long to be perfectly clean? I mean, really, do you? Would you like to say, “There is nothing between my soul and the Savior”? Clean. There is no reason—none whatsoever, none—that you cannot be absolutely, totally, perfectly clean. *“If we confess our [sin], he is faithful and just to forgive us our [sin], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

II. The Principle of Determination

Now, that’s the first step; it’s the principle of purification. Get totally clean. That’s verse 9(Psalm 119:9). Now, let’s look at verse 10, and here’s the next principle: not only the

principle of purification, but principle number two: the principle of determination. Determine to stay clean. Look in verse 10: *“With my whole heart have I sought thee”*—*“with my whole heart”*—*“my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not [stray] from thy commandments”* (Psalm 119:10). Some are going down tonight; some will never have victory. And, the reason you will not have victory is you are half-hearted rather than whole-hearted. No one—no one, no one—has ever won a moral victory half-heartedly.

Let me give you some scriptures to add to this. Deuteronomy 4, verse 29: God says, *“But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deuteronomy 4:29). Have you ever sought God with all of your heart? James 4, verse 8: *“Draw nigh to God, and [God] will draw nigh [unto] you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”* (James 4:8). *“A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways”* (James 1:8)—James 1, verse 8. Daniel chapter 1, verse 8: *“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself”* (Daniel 1:8). Have you purposed in your heart that you would not defile yourself? Job said in Job 31, verse 1: *“I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look upon a maid”* (Job 31:1). And, the Hebrew idea is that *“I will not lust after a woman. I made a covenant with my eyes.”*

Question: Have you done that? Have you said, *“O my God, with all of my heart I determine to be pure”*? I’m telling you, if you don’t say that and mean it, in today’s society, you are going down—without that determination. *God does business with those that mean business.* Now, after you do this, it doesn’t mean the battle is over, but it will never be enjoined until you go in with all of your heart. You get perfectly clean; and then, you say, *“By God’s grace, I will stay clean.”*

Years ago, I read how people would hunt for a little animal that they made fur coats out of—an ermine. This particular ermine had a coat of snow white—these kinds of animals. What they would do—they would find the hole where the ermine would run in to hide, and they would take and smear filth around the hole—something vile, something dirty, something defiling. And then, the dogs would hunt the ermine, and the ermine would run as fast as he could to the hole to get away. But, when it would see that filth and realize it would have to defile its coat of snow white to go into that hole, the ermine, rather than defile itself, would turn around and face the dogs and would give its life—give its life—rather than defile itself. Does purity mean that much to you? If not, you’re going to go down. You are half-hearted, and if you’re half-hearted, you’re not going to make it.

The principle of purification—you get totally clean. The principle of determination—you determine to stay clean. I tell you again, *God does business with those that mean business.*

I went to the marriage altar a virgin. I married a virgin. I'm glad I did. I knew the temptations that every young man knows. In college, I kept a motto on my desk, and it said this: "He who would not fall down ought not to walk in slippery places." Determination, determination—purification, determination.

III. The Principle of Fortification

Third principle—and that is the principle of fortification. Fortify yourself with the Word of God. Look in verse 11: "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11). Yes, you can get clean. Yes, you can be determined. But, you need more than that. You need something to fortify you on the inside. You need to be fortified by the Word of God. First you repent and get clean; and then, you refuse to participate. But next, after repentance and refusal comes replacement: you put something there in the place of that which you have refused and that which God has taken out; then, you put something else back in. Nature abhors a vacuum. The Word of God hidden in your heart will fortify you. But, it has to be in your heart, not in a dresser drawer. Look at it: "*Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11).

One of the greatest weapons against pornography is hiding God's Word in your heart—that is, memorization. That's the way to have a pure mind. You see, when you memorize scripture—scripture is the mind of God; scripture is the Word of God—when you have scripture in your heart and mind, you're thinking God's thoughts after Him.

Casual thoughts, casual reading of the Bible is like a bee just flitting over the surface of a flower. Memorization is like the bee going down into the heart of the flower and gathering the nectar. Meditation is like him taking it back to the hive and making honey out of it. What we need to do is gather the Word of God so we can meditate on the Word of God.

You see, God gave you a memory. Memory is a wonderful thing. Oliver Wendell Holmes said about the memory, "Memory is a crazy witch. She treasures bits of rags and straw and throws her jewels out the window." I imagine that most of you can remember the first dirty story you ever heard as a child—the first impure thing written upon your mind. Memory is there. So many people remember what they ought not to remember and forget what they ought to remember. What scripture memory does is this: it helps you to remember what you ought to remember and to forget what you ought to forget. The mind is a marvelous thing. The best computer on Earth is an idiot compared to the human mind. A mind can think about itself thinking. It's an incredible thing! And, you can hide God's Word in your heart. "*Thy word*"—"thy word"—"*have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11).

Imagine a little box—a beautiful little box. Women like little boxes. Joyce likes them. I

buy her little boxes now and then. I bought her a little heart for Valentine's Day. Wasn't that sweet? And, they like little boxes. I want you to imagine a little box made of gold, platinum, silver, encrusted with gems and diamonds, with a beautifully crafted hinge and latch. And, you see that little box; you think, "What an incredible box that is!" and you open it up and look inside. It's got gem clips and toothpicks, gum wrappers and rubber bands in that little box. The mind is like that—such an incredible instrument. And, what do people put in their minds? Just junk—just junk.

You want to teach your children to live victoriously? Teach them to memorize their scripture and reward them for memorizing the scripture. You say, "Well, I don't believe in bribing kids to do good." It is not a bribe; it's a reward. A bribe is an inducement to do evil; a reward is a recognition for doing good. The Bible teaches rewards. Jesus said, "*Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according [to] his [works] shall be*" (Revelation 22:12).

What I'm working on—and you can help me. If you know any good verses, jot them down—I'm creating a little box of memory verses that deal with mental purity and moral purity. I'm going to have them printed and put in a little box so that you adults can memorize them and so the children can memorize them—dealing especially with moral purity. "*Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11). That is just simply plain, and pure, and true. That's the way to do it.

First of all, purification; secondly, determination; thirdly, fortification. You fortify yourself with the Word of God. Let me show you what the Word of God will do. Take your Bibles, and turn to Philippians 4. Just put your bookmark there in Psalm 119. Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9: "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you*" (Philippians 4:8–9). Now remember, I told you that the thought is the dress rehearsal for the deed. You sow a thought—you reap a deed. Sow a deed—you reap a habit. Sow a habit—you reap a character. Sow a character, and you reap a destiny. It all begins with the thought. Now, James Allen said this: "Good thoughts bear good fruit. Bad thoughts bear bad fruit. And, man is his own gardener."

You can choose your thoughts like you choose your friends. What you need to do is to put a guard on your mind. When I travel in the airports, as you do, you go through a magnetometer. And, they say, "Empty your pockets. Take out the metal. Take out the calculators. Take this thing, that thing"—and you put it in a tray. And, you walk through; you start to go through, and it says—*buzzer sound*. You back up, it—*buzzer sound*. You back up, put your glasses, your fountain pen—*buzzer sound*. Back up again, take the

change out of your pocket, and you put that in the basket. And, after a while, you go through—you go through. Now, you need to have something like that at the gate of your mind. There are certain things that you just don't let through. As a matter of fact, I've told you before, I'd like one of those over the door—each door—as you go out. If there's any sin in your heart, it will say, "Envy, come back in. Let him preach some more—but not to get the sin out, but to keep the sin out."

There are certain things that you just say, "I'm not going to let in my mind." For example, let's let some words start with the letter "R" so you can remember them. What—how do you put a gate there at your mind?

A. The Reliance Test

Number one: There is what I want to call "the reliance test": "*whatsoever things are true*" (Philippians 4:8). Can you rely on it? Is it true? You see, we have a generation today that doesn't even believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. We don't ask anymore, "Is it true?" We just ask, "Does it work?" The reliance test.

B. The Respect Test

Number two: the respect test: "*whatsoever things are honest*" (Philippians 4:8). Now, the word *honest* here literally means, in the Greek language, "whatsoever things are honorable, worthy of respect." Don't let any thing that is dishonorable into your mind.

C. The Readiness Test

Number three: the readiness test—I mean, the rightness test: "*whatsoever things are just*" (Philippians 4:8). The word *just* here means "that which is straight." Don't let any crooked, warped thinking into your mind.

D. The Reverence Test

And then, the reverence test: "*whatsoever things are pure*" (Philippians 4:8). Now, the word *pure* here actually has the idea of free from contamination. It was used of animals that were ready to be sacrificed—an animal that was contaminated. For example, we're hearing a lot today about mad cow disease. Well, such an animal would not be fit for sacrifice in Bible times. It would have to be pure; it would have to be without contamination. And, it's something that you could use to worship God with. Can you worship God with your thoughts? I mean, with the Lord Jesus Christ looking into your mind, could you say, "Lord, that's a thought that I'm happy to entertain with You"? That is a pure thought.

E. The Relationship Test

Then, the relationship test: "*whatsoever things are lovely*" (Philippians 4:8). That doesn't mean "beautiful to look at." That's a combination of two Greek words, which mean "moving towards love." If it causes you to love, if it moves you to love, if it's lovely, then

you think about it. Remember last Sunday night that I told you one of the worst things about pornography is that it is the opposite of love? Love wants to give; lust wants to get. Pornography looks upon people as objects, things to be used, rather than persons to be truly loved. So, you ask yourself, “Is this causing me to have an attitude of love toward somebody else, or is it causing me to look at someone made in the image of God as less than lovable?”

F. **The Refinement Test**

The refinement test: “*whatsoever things are of good report*” (Philippians 4:8). Now, that word actually means “high tone.” You don’t have to listen to things that are low tone. Somebody says, “Well, you know, I just don’t know why people tell me these things all the time.” Well, I know why: they know they can use your ears for garbage cans; they know that they can track their muddy feet on the carpet of your mind. But, if it’s not high toned, you don’t have to listen to it.

And then, he says here, as he just sums it up, “*if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*” (Philippians 4:8).

Now, I’ve often told you something wonderful, something glorious: God made you where you can’t think two thoughts at one time, and if you’re thinking what is right, you cannot be thinking what is wrong. And, the way to think not to think what is wrong is to think what is right. You cannot not think impure thoughts, because while you’re trying not to think impure thoughts, you’re thinking about the impure thoughts you’re trying not to think about. It’s a catch-22; it’s a vicious trap.

If I were to tell you right now, “Don’t think about an elephant. Try not—try not—to think about an elephant for a minute, okay?” Now, what are you thinking about? You’re thinking about the elephant you’re trying not to think about. Isn’t that right? But, you were not thinking about a zebra because you were thinking about an elephant, right? Right.

All right. Now, if you’re thinking about one thing, you’re not thinking about another thing, and you cannot think two thoughts at one time. And, if you’re thinking about what is right, you cannot be thinking about that which is wrong. No one can think two thoughts at one time, and that’s the reason the Bible gives us this list of things that you think about.

Well, where are these things found? In the Word of God. You fortify yourself with the Word of God, because when you have the Word of God in you, you’re thinking God’s thoughts after Him. You say, “Well, Pastor Rogers, what if I’m walking through the mall and walk past Victoria’s Secret? I looked over there. What if I open up the catalog and I see a lingerie ad? What if I’m watching television, and all of a sudden a salacious thing comes on? That just bombards my mind. I didn’t choose to watch that. What do I do?” Do you know the difference between unsaved people and saved people and Spirit-filled

people—the way they look at these things? They see them from a different viewpoint. The minute they are confronted with something like this, then they still think about it in the light of God’s Word. Now listen, it is not only a matter of what you think about, but how you think about these things. The Christian mind and the non-Christian mind may think about the same things, but they don’t think about the same things the same way.

Now, if you are with your child and something bombards you like that, then what you do is take the Word of God and say, “Sweetheart, what does God’s Word say about that? How do we see that?” You see, we discern it from a different viewpoint. Never willingly bring your mind to anything like that, but when you have to face something like that, still, you’re facing that through the lens of God’s Word. So, there’s the principle of fortification.

IV. The Principle of Vitalization

Principle number four: There is the principle of vitalization—vitalization. Ask God to teach you. Look, if you will, in verse 12: “*Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:12). So then, what you do—you turn fortification into prayer. You say, “Now, O God, teach me.” You pray—ask God to put His hand upon you. Facts and memory are not enough—even Bible facts. You cannot separate the Word the God from the God of that Word. And, you must pray, “O God, make it real in my heart.” The Holy Spirit in you will take the Word of God, which is living and alive, and will vitalize it to you.

There was a man who was a new Christian. He was being mentored by another man named Charlie, and Charlie was his Bible teacher. They had great fellowship, and it’s always good to have a mentor to teach the Word of God to you. But, one day this man was studying the Scripture, and Charlie was nowhere around. He said, “I wonder what that means? Boy, when Charlie comes, I’m going to ask Charlie what that means.” And, he felt the Holy Spirit whispering to him—and said, “Why don’t you ask Me? I’m the One that taught Charlie.”

Oh, you can pray, and say, “Lord, teach me. Teach me Thy statutes, Thy law.” Vitalize it; make it real. You see, prayerlessness is bad enough, but what prayerlessness indicates is even worse: it indicates that we’re quite confident that we can do it by ourselves.

Now, you hide God’s Word in your heart. But then, you say, “God, vitalize it. Make it real to me. I just don’t want to be rattling off memory verses. Rattling off memory verses is not enough.” Now, it’s the principle of vitalization.

V. The Principle of Verbalization

Next principle is the principle of verbalization—verbalization. Keep the Word of God on your lips. Now, he speaks about the Word of God in your heart; but now, he talks about

the Word of God on your lips. Look in verse 13: *“With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth”* (Psalm 119:13). Begin to verbalize it. You see, when you vitalize it—memorize it, vitalize it—then verbalize it. Confession and profession are linked together. You take the Word of God and begin to download it to other people. Or, just take it and speak it out loud to God.

You may sing it. We sang the Word of God today. We sang some songs today that were direct quotations of the Word of God. Singing scripture is one of the best things that you can do to have the Word of God in your mouth, in your lips. Why is it? Because there is a symbiotic relationship: the Word of God goes from the heart to the mouth out, and from the mouth back to the heart, and one builds upon another. And, as you move in and out among brothers and sisters, you verbalize the Word of God.

Listen, when you begin to give the Word of God away, the Word of God sticks to you. Did you know that? Did you know that there is a kind of a secret that preachers have? It’s a blessed secret. We get to preach the Bible. And, you know, when we get to preach the Bible, something happens that is just so wonderful. It’s a reflector. You cannot study for a sermon—prepare, think, pray and preach it—without it just saturating. That’s just a trade secret. I find myself sometimes repeating passages of Scripture that I never even intended to memorize because I’ve had to deal with it.

A. Give Your Testimony to Others

All right, verbalization—learn to speak the Word of God. Share the Word of God. Sing the Word of God. These three men who are singing together—they stand, and they look at one another; and they sing the things of God. Do you know what they have done? They have positioned themselves—they’ve positioned themselves where they will now begin to reinforce one another. We need to have accountability. We need to share the Word of God. Put the Word of God on our lips. And, not only do we vitalize it and say, “Lord, teach it to me,” but we verbalize it and begin to share it with other people. And, somehow just the very speaking of God’s Word gives us force. You read in the Book of the Revelation where the early Christians were at warfare with Satan, and the Bible says, *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and...the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death”* (Revelation 12:11).

B. Give Your Testimony to Yourself

Did you know that you can give your testimony—give it other people—but not only give it to other people, give it to yourself? You can say, “I belong to You, Lord Jesus. You’re mine.” Have you ever given your testimony to yourself? I give mine to me lots of times. I just say who I am in the Lord Jesus Christ and just speak it.

C. Give Your Testimony to the Devil

But, I tell you who else you can give your testimony to—you can give your testimony to the devil. You can! The next time Satan gets on your trail with some dirty fault, some foul thing, some temptation, you can say this to him—when your heart is clean, when you’ve done that purification, when you’ve done that determination, when you have done that fortification, when you have done that vitalization, then the devil gets on your trail—you say, “Devil, I want to tell you something: your back was broken at Calvary. You are defeated. You’re a pervert. You have no right in my life. You have no authority in my life. I belong to Jesus Christ. My body, heart, soul, mind is His. You’re trespassing on my Father’s property. And, in the name of Jesus, be gone!” *“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you”* (James 4:8). *“Resist the devil...he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). Learn to verbalize the Word of God.

VI. The Principle of Evaluation

The principle of verbalization—verse 13 (Psalm 119:13). Verse 14: the principle of evaluation—remember your true riches: *“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches”* (Psalm 119:14). Remember last week when we talked about Moses? Moses made a decision. He saw the pleasures of sin; he saw the riches of Christ. He made an evaluation, and when he made an evaluation, then he made a choice. And, after he made the choice, then Moses “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He refused to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the children of God”—why?—“because he esteemed the riches of Christ greater than all the treasure of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:24–26).

You see, you have to have an evaluation. Teach your boys and girls, teach yourself, what you are giving up. Who wants to give up diamonds for dirt? Who wants to eat swill when they can feed on manna and nectar? If we could only get people to think! There has to be a choice. There has to be an evaluation. You have to choose. You choose the true riches, and you are satisfied with the Lord Jesus Christ.

A mind that is feeding on trash is a mind that hungry. I’ve seen people eating out of garbage cans, literally. In Rodeo Way in California (one of the most elegant, upscale places in America), I saw a man—a young man—with his head way down in a garbage can, literally eating out of a garbage can. My heart broke. What would cause a man to eat out of a garbage can? Number one: hunger. Number two: no sense of shame—no sense of shame. Why would a person put garbage in his mouth? “Well,” you say, “because he’s hungry.” Point: You don’t have to be hungry; you can feed on Jesus. I don’t have to be out in a back alley eating tin cans with the devil’s Billy goats if I’ve just been feasting with the Lord Jesus Christ, if I see what I have in the Lord Jesus Christ. *“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches”* (Psalm 119:14)—

the principle of evaluation.

VII. The Principle of Meditation

Now, here's the final principle, and that's the principle of meditation: maintain a constant communion with the Lord. Look, now, in verse 15, if you will: *"I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word"* (Psalm 119:15–16). Meditation is a powerful, powerful force to keep your mind pure.

There are three elements in meditation: time, quietness and concentration. If you will spend some time concentrating on the Word of God and thinking about it, it will do something wonderful for your thought life. The word *meditate* has two thoughts. One: As I've told you before, it has the thought of a cow chewing the cud. I'm not a farm boy. Don't know, here, a lot about farming. Dr. Vincent's here. Dr. Vinson, Barbara—they've got the cows. I think what I'm saying is correct, doctor. If I'm wrong, you stand up to correct me. No, don't. See me later.

When a cow would go out there in the pasture, and get that clover, and that alfalfa, and that grass, and he digests it—and he has, I think, four stomachs, and he just somehow places it there. And then, he'll go out to meditate. That is, he'll go out and lie down in the pasture somewhere. And, his brain sends a message to his stomach and says, "Alfalfa, please." Up comes the alfalfa, and he or she will chew it, swallow it down. And, maybe—"Clover, please," and chew that for awhile and get the juice out of it. "Send it back down again." The Word of God is like that: you know, you get it in; you ingest it; then you digest it. You chew on it over and over and over and over again. I find myself going to bed thinking the Word of God, waking up—the first thought in the morning thinking the Word of God.

It's also like a tune you can't get out of your mind. Have you ever had a little tune you can't get out of your mind? You deserve a break today? A little thing—it just gets in your mind. Whatever it is, it gets there. Well, get the Word of God in your mind so you meditate on it day after day.

Let me just give you a few verses in this same psalm. Psalm 119, verse 15: *"I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways"* (Psalm 119:15). Psalm 119, verse 23: *"Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:23). Psalm 119, verse 48: *"My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:48). Psalm 119, verse 97: *"O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day"* (Psalm 119:97).

Conclusion

Now, what I have done is taken one short passage of Scripture, and I have given you seven principles. Now, listen to me: take these seven principles—memorize them. If you're not a good note taker, you probably don't even have them all down yet. Get the tape. Listen over and over and over again. It will be worth it. Put it into practice. Don't you be a hypocrite to try to teach your children something that you're not practicing. God will get you for that. You get your heart right—get your heart clean. You guard your heart so you can protect your home. Then, you take your children—you walk your children through this thing. You say to them, "Look, you can be clean. You don't have to let the devil have a dirty groove in your mind, a rut in your mind. You can have that way cleansed." And then, you go through the rest of the steps.

I'm praying that we have some parents in America today who'll begin to take charge to guard their heart and protect their homes. And again, I remind you that *God does business with those that mean business.*

Next Sunday night I'm going to be talking to you about some very practical things that you can do (not that this has not been practical, but this has been more or less philosophical and theological). We're going to be talking about some hands-on things, and I want you to be present.

Let's bow our heads together in prayer. Would you pray right now, "Dear God, teach me Your statutes"? Would you pray what the psalmist prayed? "Lord, teach me. Lord, help me to know these things. Help me to take what the pastor said that is out of Your Word and, Lord, apply it to my heart." If you've been having difficulty in these matters—and a lot of fine people are fighting a real battle—tell God that you're having a battle, that you have determined with your whole heart to have victory. Tell Him that, and tell Him that you'll be like that ermine—no matter what the price, you're going to stay pure. If you don't make that kind of decision, you're going down. And, even if you make that kind of decision, if you don't use God's method, you're still not going to have victory.

Father God, in the name of Jesus, seal this message to our hearts, and help me and help us, Lord, that we might truly have victory in our thought life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, look up here. I've been speaking tonight to those who are children of God, those who are saved. But, I'm sure that in a crowd of several thousand like this, there will be some who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. And oh, you long to know Him, or you wouldn't even be here tonight. So, I want to give you an invitation to give your heart to Jesus. The best way to guard your heart is to have the Lord Jesus Christ on the inside. Christianity is not behavior modification. You can't purify the water by painting the pump. It's an internal change; it's Christ in the heart. And, if you want to be saved tonight, God will save you. He'll transform you. The same God that saved me as a teenage boy will save you; the same God that has kept me all these years will keep you.

You know, I thought about what these young men sang tonight: “If I had to choose today, I’d choose Him.” Do you remember when they sang that? Nod your head. I thought about that. I said, “Yes, I’d choose Him in a heartbeat.” Sometimes I almost wish I were lost so I could get saved all over again. Oh, to know Jesus! And, I want you to know Him. Would you give your heart to Him tonight? Would you say, “Lord Jesus, I need You. I want You. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus”? And, He’ll do it—I promise you.

When we sing this invitational hymn, if you want Jesus, you leave your seat and come forward. Standing at the head of each of these aisles is a man of God—all the way across the front. You just tell him, “I want to be saved,” or, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Put it in your own words. We’ll take a Bible, and guide you in this decision, and seal it in prayer.

Others of you, if you need a church home, I want to invite you to come, especially if you have children, grandchildren. You need to be a part of a church that’s helping to do something to fight this battle. If you need a church home—you believe as we believe; you know that you’re saved—I invite you to come and say, “I want to place my membership here.”

Some are coming, saying, “I’m trusting Jesus.” Others—“I want to place my membership here.” Let’s stand together as we sing.

How to Have a Clean Thought Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 18, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:9–16

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”*

PSALMS 119:9

Outline

Introduction

- A. The Factors of Pornography
 - 1. The Addiction Factor
 - 2. The Escalation Factor
 - 3. The Desensitization Factor
 - 4. The Action Factor
 - B. The Damage Pornography Causes
 - 1. Domestic Damage
 - 2. Spiritual Damage
 - I. Purification
 - II. Determination
 - III. Fortification
 - A. The Reliance Test
 - B. The Respect Test
 - C. The Rightness Test
 - D. The Reverence Test
 - E. The Relationship Test
 - F. The Refinement Test
 - IV. Vitalization
 - V. Verbalization
 - VI. Appreciation
 - VII. Meditation
- Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and be finding Psalm 119 (where we were, this morning)? And tonight, we’re going to be thinking again about the thought life. The thought life is so important, and the Bible says—you just stay there now, in Psalm 119—but in

Proverbs chapter 4, verse 23, the Bible says, “*Keep [your] heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*” (Proverbs 4:23). And, when the Bible uses the word *heart*, it does not mean the organ that pumps in the thoracic cavity and circulates the blood; it literally is synonymous with the mind. “*As [a man] thinketh...so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). It is used, this word *heart*, more than 400 times in the Old Testament to refer to the thought life. In the New Testament, the word is the *mind*. And, it’s so important that you keep your mind right, because out of your mind comes your attitudes. Out of your attitudes come your achievements—or, your actions—and out of your actions come your achievements. It all begins in the thought life.

Someone a long time ago said, “Sow a thought—you reap a deed. Sow a deed—you reap a habit. Sow a habit—you reap a character. Sow a character—you reap a destiny.” It all begins in the thought life. The thought is the controlling matter in all of life. And, we read over there in Genesis 6, where God destroyed an entire civilization because of the way that they thought. Genesis 6, verse 5: “*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5). Now, if God destroyed an entire civilization because of their evil thoughts, don’t you believe that America is ripe for judgment? You think about it. You know how God feels about that.

Now, when God wants to transform you, how does God transform us? “*Be not conformed to this world: but be...transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). That’s what the Apostle Paul told us in Roman 12. So, it is so very important that we understand something about the thought life, because, as we preached Sunday before last, there is a battle for your mind. And, Satan wants your mind to use your mind to war against God and, ultimately, against you. God wants to use your mind for His glory.

Now, Satan has done something terrible to America. I mean, there is a floodtide of filth that is being spewed across our land. It is like a sewer pipe has broken. Have you noticed? It is incredible. And, it is not getting better; it is worse. What was horrible yesterday is accepted today and becomes a steppingstone for something worse tomorrow. And, the basic message of all of this thing that is coming upon us is what is called *pornography*, and that is sexual activity that is divorced from love—sexual activity that is divorced from commitment, from morality, and from responsibility. And, it is a multibillion-dollar industry. I didn’t say, “*multimillion-dollar*”—*multibillion* dollar industry. More than the legitimate film and record company put together is the pornography business. And, a great preponderance of pornography ends up in the hands of children.

I may have told you what happened to me some time ago. I was driving down Poplar Avenue, and there was a little wooded section. And, I saw two little guys; they looked to me to be between seven and ten. And, they had a briefcase there at the edge at the

woods. Now, I want to ask a question: What are two little guys doing with a briefcase? And, they scurried off into the woods. They weren't my boys, but I couldn't drive past. I parked the car, got out and stood at the edge of the woods, and I said in the kind of a voice that I felt would threaten them—I said, "All right, boys, come out of there." I didn't hear anything. I said, "You heard me. Come out right now." Two little boys, like squirrels coming out of a log, came out and stood before me, but the briefcase was not there. I said, "Where's the briefcase?" They said, "What briefcase?" I said, "You know what briefcase. Where is that briefcase?" They said, "It's not our briefcase." I said, "Go get it." They said, "What?" I said, "Go get it. Bring it out here." I said, "Boys, open that briefcase." They didn't know who I was. "Open that briefcase." They said, "Do we have to?" I said, "Indeed! Open it right now" (stern as I could say it). With trembling fingers, they opened the briefcase. It was full of pornography, full of filth. I said, "Boys, where did you get that?" "Oh," they said, "it's not ours. It belongs to some other boys."

I said, "Boys, would you put garbage in your mouth?" "No, sir." I said, "Don't put garbage in your minds." And, I gave them a little lecture, a little talk, and they said, "We're sorry, mister. We won't do this again. What do you want us to do with this?" I said, "Give it to me." Then, I thought, "Man, what have I done?" They said, "Are you going to tell our parents?" I said, "Not if you'll promise not to do this anymore." They said, "We promise. We promise. We promise." I put that briefcase of pornography in my automobile and drove off, and I said, "God, if I have an accident, I'm holding You responsible, Lord." And, I drove to a local high school where there was an incinerator, found the incinerator, opened it up, and put all of that on the inside. Folks, I want to tell you, it broke my heart to think these little guys that age were already poisoning their mind with this filth. It is everywhere.

A. **The Factors of Pornography**

And, Victor Kline, who is a psychologist, tells us about what pornography does. It is not a harmless thing.

1. The Addiction Factor

The very first thing pornography does is there is an addiction aspect. It's not that you simply look at it and forget it. Those who look at pornography, especially males, get hooked on this material. And, the pornographer knows that they're going to keep coming back and back.

2. The Escalation Factor

But, after the addiction factor, there comes an escalation factor. What titillated, what amazed, to begin with does not anymore, so they have to have material that is rougher, more deviant, more explicit—and there's plenty of that.

3. The Desensitization Factor

And then, after there comes that escalation, then there comes a desensitizing. What used to shock and what used to depress doesn't shock, and it doesn't depress. It becomes tolerated; it becomes accepted.

4. The Action Factor

And then, according to Dr. Kline, the next step is that those who read this and see this find an urge to act out what they see, what they are doing—if it's a child on some other child, if it's a man, if maybe on his wife or one of his children or on somebody else or child. And, the devil, through pornography, has gotten a claw into the mind.

It's a social sickness. A Harvard professor said that Americans with pornography are victims of a sex mania as malignant as cancer and as menacing as communism." And, it's all over the land today. And, it is not just simply pornography that deals with adults. We have what is called today "kiddy porn," and I don't even want to try to describe it. And, the sad thing is so much of it now is on the Internet.

Now, there are some egg-headed psychologists—tell you that pornography is a legitimate outlet, that people have these pent up sexual desires: they just see this pornography, and it brings a legitimate outlet to help a person who might be some sort of a sexual deviant. If you believe that, you believe also that you cure drug addicts with heroin, and that you cure alcoholics with alcohol, and you put our fires with gasoline, if you believe that. In America today, the statisticians tell us that one baby girl in four will be sexually abused by an adult male, and one baby boy in ten—just count them off—will be abused by an adult male. A trained policeman said, "Not everyone who reads pornography is a sex deviant, but every sex deviant reads it."

B. The Damage Pornography Causes

And, there's such damage there.

1. Domestic Damage

There's the domestic damage. I can tell, as a pastor, of homes and hearts that have been broken. So often a male will saturate his mind with this—pictures and stories of all kinds of things that I'm not going to try to describe in the pulpit—and then he tries to act those things out, sometimes with the one that he loves or with somebody else's wife.

2. Spiritual Damage

It has a devastating effect on the spiritual aspect of a person—pornography does. James 1, verses 14 and following: "*every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. [And] then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*"—and then, James says—"Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1:14–16). He's talking now about the thought life. Jesus said, "If a man looks on a woman to lust after her, he hath committed adultery with her in his

heart” (Matthew 5:28). There is nothing, nothing, nothing more devastating to the spiritual life than this matter of pornography. And, I’m going to tell you this—every psychologist will tell you this: when it gets into your mind and it gets into your heart, it will be expressed some way. Now, don’t let that go past: it will be expressed some way.

Well, enough of that. Let’s get on the positive side. I want to give you seven steps tonight to a clean thought life. And, we’re going to take them right here from Psalm 119, and they’re going to be found in verses 9 through 16. So, keep your Bible open—Psalm 119, verses 9 through 16. And, I want you young men especially to listen, but I want each mother’s child to listen.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed are thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will mediate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (Psalm 119:9–16). Now, in that passage of Scripture, there are seven steps that will help you to have a clean thought life. If you’re a father or mother, you need, first of all, to take these into your own heart, and then you need to gently, lovingly, but very carefully and diligently, teach these to your children.

I. Purification

Step number one: purification—purification. Get clean. Look, if you will now, in verse 9: *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:9). Now, you’ve got to get clean first. Most of us have minds that have already been messed up. But, thank God, there is a way to get clean. It says, *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”* (Psalm 119:9). Do you see the word *way*? Look at it. The word *way* has the idea of a rut. The Hebrew word has...it has an idea like a rut in a road, like a groove. What he’s saying is this: that sometimes we get a muddy track in our mind; it’s a rut. We have a one-track mind. Have you been around people like that?

I’ve worked in the construction business when I was working my way through school, and to work around construction men... There are men, and some of you guys know people like this, every word you say somewhere—they’re going to twist it and make something filthy out of it. You’ve been around somebody like that? They will make some joke, something dirty, something obscene, but...because these men have a rut. They have a muddy track in their mind, and everything turns toward this thing. It is a way; it is a secret addiction, and it needs to be cleansed.

The Word of God, however, is the secret to getting your mind clean. You can take the Bible, and the Bible will cleanse you. Let me give you some scripture. The Lord Jesus said—and put this in the margin—John 15 and verse 3: “[you] are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). Now, the Word of God—and, by the way, the word *clean* here that Jesus uses in the New Testament is the word we get our word *catharsis* from. You know what a catharsis is? That’s a cleansing from the inside—the Word of God is a catharsis. You take the Bible, take the truths of God’s Word, and you can let the cleansing tides of Calvary and the breezes of the Holy Spirit just flow through you; and you can come out and be absolutely, totally clean. The Bible says that “*the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] us from all [unrighteousness]*” (1 John 1:7). And, it’s the Word of God that teaches us this. And, I’m telling you tonight, if you’ve got a dirty mind, if there is a muddy rut in your mind, the very first thing you have to do is, according to the Word of God, come and let Jesus Christ cleanse you.

One day, I saw something that was vile and awful. It was there in my mind like a claw in my brain. I went and got on my knees, and I said, “Lord, I want You to take that from my mind. I want to be cleansed. I do not want that in my mind. Come, dear Lord, and cleanse me.” And, He did—He did!

Think of your mind as a house. Think of Jesus coming and doing Spring cleaning, and just let Him cleanse it. Wait before Him until there is absolutely no sin—not only in the thought life, but in any area of your life. Be absolutely, totally clean. You say, “Pastor, can a man be totally clean?” Certainly! Not only *can* he be—*should* he be. And, there’s not a mother’s child in this building tonight that should not be absolutely, totally clean. The Bible says, “*The blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). There must be this purification.

Years ago, when I was a 19-year-old boy, I pastored a church in Fellsmere, Florida. That was a sugar mill town, and I would go out to the sugar mill to witness and talk to the men who worked in the mill. And, they had a big garage, Brother Bob. You know, being in the heavy equipment business before God put you in the ministry, it was a big garage full of all kinds of machinery. They were working on machinery. And, you know how garages can get dirty. But, a good foreman likes a well-ordered garage, and the man in my church was very careful about that machinery shop. All—everything—was stacked; everything was just right. I went out there. The floors—they were so clean you could almost eat off of them, and this was big machinery. But, one thing that man did—he knew if he kept that place clean that they would be more efficient in their business. And, I looked, and he had every corner. There were four corners in that big garage. He had every corner in that garage painted snow white—snow white. He wouldn’t let them put anything...nothing stacked in the corners. Every corner was snow white. I asked him

about that. I said, “Why are the corners white?” He said, “I find out if I can keep the corners white, I can keep the rest of it clean.” And, he just kept the corners snow white. I mean, they were absolutely like your living room—snow white. Friend, let God do that to the corners of your mind. Don’t let there be any little place out there.

Just, number one: Start with cleansing. Get clean. I’ve got wonderful news for you: *“the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses]...from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:9). Isn’t it good news to know that we can be clean? I don’t care what you’ve done. I am telling you—I am telling—you that Jesus Christ, tonight, can take your mind—that mind that’s had that dirty rut that’s been worn, the groove in your mind—He can cleanse it! All right. First step: purification. Get clean.

II. Determination

Step number two: determination—determination. You must determine to stay clean. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *“With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments”* (Psalm 119:10). The problem with many of us is that we get clean, and then what do we do? We wander away. So, you’ve got to be determined. May I tell you that the scourge of 20th-century Christianity is half-hearted Christians? Remember that I told you that there is a battle for your mind? And, I’m going to tell you something else: if you’re half-hearted, you’re going to lose the battle for your mind.

James is talking about the mind. Put this verse down—James 4, verse 8: James says, *“Draw nigh to God...he will draw nigh to you”*—now, listen to this—*“Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded”* (James 4:8). He says, “Listen, get rid of those dirty hands by getting rid of that double mind.” James says—chapter 1, verse 8: *“A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways”* (James 1:8).

I want to ask you teenagers something, boys and girls; I want to ask you men something: Have you ever truly—truly, now—before God, determined to have a pure mind? I mean, with all of your heart—with all of your heart? Look at the scripture again: *“With my whole heart have I sought thee”* (Psalm 119:10). Now, if you’re half-hearted, you’re going to be faint-hearted, and you’re going to lose the battle.

Young Daniel—handsome, virile—was taken off to Babylon, a place of licentiousness and wickedness. But, the Bible says in Daniel chapter 1 and verse 8: *“But Daniel purposed in his heart...he would not defile himself”* (Daniel 1:8). Have you ever done that? Have you—I say, have you? Have you said, “God, with my whole heart I choose to be pure”? The patriarch Job—the Bible says Job, speaking for himself, said there, *“I made”—in Job chapter 31 and verse 1—“I made a covenant with [my] eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”* (Job 31:1). *“I made a covenant with [my] eyes”*

(Job 31:1)—“I just simply said, ‘I’m not going to do that.’”

I travel; I go into hotels. In hotels, now, you can just about get anything that is filthy, and wicked, and licentious that you want. You businessman that travel—you’re away from your wife, away from your family. Friend, I don’t have to, every time I go into a hotel, make up my mind whether I’m going to watch that stuff. I’ve already made up my mind—I’ve made up my mind. I have made a covenant with my eyes, with my whole heart. Now, if you don’t do this with your whole heart, I’m telling you, sir, the pull is so strong and the filth is so available, you’re going to go down. You get clean.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9). And then, you determine to stay clean with your whole heart.

Years ago, I read about how hunters used to trap the little white animal called an ermine. Women want an ermine coat; some think it more lovely than a mink coat. The ermine has snow-white fur. The hunter would go out and find the ermine’s hole, where the ermine would live there beneath the ground, and they would take filth, and tar, and mud and put it around the mouth of that entrance to that little ermine cave. And then, the dogs would go to try to find the ermine. And, when the ermine would come there with its snow-white fur and see that filth, the ermine would stop, turn around, and face the dogs—face the dogs—rather than to defile himself with that. Rather blood than mud.

Mister, I want to ask you a question again: Are you serious about being clean? Now, if you’re not serious about being clean, why don’t you just get up and leave? Because I’m telling you, the rest of the sermon’s not going to do you any good at all. As a matter of fact, it’ll just bring more judgment to you—I’m serious. It would be better for you not to be here if you’re not serious, if you don’t say, “With my whole heart.” It’s too persuasive. It’s too pervasive. It is too seductive. You’re going to go down if you do not do it. And so, make that determination.

You say, “Well, Pastor, you’re just an old coot. It doesn’t bother you anymore.” Well, I was once a young guy. I know what raging hormones are. When I was in college, I had a sign on my desk that I wrote out and put there that said, “He who would not fall down ought not to walk in slippery places.” You can’t take a fire in your bosom and be not burned (Proverbs 6:27). The Bible says you can’t go upon hot coals and it not affect you (Proverbs 6:28).

III. Fortification

So, there must be this determination—determined to stay clean. First of all, purification; then, determination—but that’s not enough. Number three: fortification—fortification. Look in verse 11, if you will now: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). Once you get clean, once you determine to stay clean, then begin to load up on the Word of God. You see, the Word of God is that thing that

fortifies you.

And, notice where the Word of God must be hid: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart”* (Psalm 119:11). You can’t hide it in your trunk or in a dresser drawer. That means, as a tried to tell you this morning, you’ve got to have a quiet time with the Lord. There has to be this time for Bible reading; there has to be this time for meditation. What good is the Word of God if you don’t assimilate it? If you were to take a dime and a gold nugget and put them both on the bottom of the ocean, practically, they’re both worth the same thing—a dime and a gold nugget. What good is the treasure of God’s Word if it’s not hidden away in your heart? So, what you’ve got to do is to load up on the Word of God.

How does the Bible keep you pure? Well, I’ll tell you how the Bible keeps you pure. When you have the Word of God—you hide God’s Word in your heart—then you think God’s thoughts. And, if you think God’s thoughts, then you’re going to stay pure, because He has wonderfully engineered us—God has wonderfully made us—where we can’t think two thoughts at one time.

Now, keep your Bible there, in your margin in...or open, if you will, to Psalm 119. And, turn to Philippians 4—Philippians 4. And, we’re beginning now in verse 8. Paul is talking here about how to have a healthy thought life, and here’s what he says: he says, *“Finally, brethren”*—Philippians 4, verse 8—*“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). Now, what’s he talking about here? He’s talking now about fortification—how to fortify your life.

You could say, “I’m going to let certain things into my mind, and I’m going to keep certain things out of my mind.” And, nobody can do that for you. Teenager, your mom can’t do that for you. You have too many ways to get at it. Your dad can’t do that for you. Mister, your wife cannot do that for you. You have to *“keep [your mind] with all diligence”* (Proverbs 4:23). It is your mind. If you do not get it clean, and determine to keep it clean, and then fortify it, you’re going to go down. You must—you must, I say—fortify yourself with the Word of God. *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11).

Now, look at these things that Paul mentions over here in Philippians chapter 4. How do you guard your mind? First of all... Look, let me give you some tests and let them begin with the letter “R.”

A. The Reliance Test

First of all, there’s the reliance test. He says, *“Whatsoever things are pure”*—*“whatsoever things are pure”* (Philippians 4:8). Now, that doesn’t refer to facts; he’s not talking here about facts. Why, excuse me—*“Whatsoever things are true”* (Philippians 4:8), rather. Not pure, but *“whatsoever things are true”* (Philippians 4:8). That’s the first

thing. He's not talking here about facts. What he is talking about here is truth. You can get a mindful of facts, but what you need is a mindful of truth.

Now, we have a generation today that has jettisoned truth. Truth is relative to many today. We're pragmatists today. We don't ask, "Is it true?" We just ask, "Does it work? Does it work?" So, number one: the reliance test.

B. The Respect Test

Number two: the respect test. "*Whatever things are honest*" (Philippians 4:8). And, the word *honest* here in the *King James* literally means "honorable." Don't let anything in your mind that is dishonorable, not worthy of respect. Don't let anything in your mind that you would not want other people to know that's in your mind—that you wouldn't want your mother, your sweetheart, your brother, your sister, your children to know. You see, there must be that reliance test: Can you rely on it? Is it true? There must be that respect test: Is it honorable?

C. The Rightness Test

And then, there's the rightness test. "*Whatever things are just*" (Philippians 4:8). Now, *just*, here, means "straight as" over against crooked. Is your thinking straight? Do you have muddled thinking, or is your thinking just? That is, is it right?

D. The Reverence Test

And then, there's the reverence test. "*Whatever things are pure*" (Philippians 4:8). And, the word *pure*, here, means "free from contamination." It actually has the idea of that which is worthy to be offered as a sacrifice to God. The animals that were sacrificed had to be pure. So, you ask yourself, "Is this thought worthy of God? I mean, would I want Jesus to know what I'm thinking? Can I take this thought—can I take this entertainment, can I take this literature—can I offer it to Him? Is it pure?" That's the reverence test.

E. The Relationship Test

And then, the relationship test. "*Whatever things are lovely*" (Philippians 4:8). That doesn't mean like flowers and sunsets. Actually, the word is different. It, literally, it's made up of two words, which mean "toward love." Does it cause you to love other people? Can you express love through this thing? Or, what you are doing and what you are watching—would it degrade and pull down other people? Is it—is it—toward love? The relationship test.

F. The Refinement Test

And then, the refinement test: Is it of good report? Now, that means, "Is it high tone?" There are some things that just pull you down; there are other things that just lift them up. Don't let something muddy your mind.

And then, Paul, unless he's forgotten anything, he says, "[And] if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Now folks, just put a guard at your mind. You can choose your thoughts. You can refuse thoughts. I think I told you a couple of weeks ago, sometimes I may wake up in the middle of the night and some thought—some bad thought—will be in your head. You know, the mind's funny. You get some bad thought—it just comes. I said, "Where did that come from?" Perhaps something you saw, some subliminal something—and it's there. And, you wake up, and it's in your mind. Do you know what I've found? This is so wonderful: you can just say, "I refuse that in the name of Jesus," and just begin to think God's thoughts after Him, and it goes. I'm telling you, you can choose your thoughts. You're not a slave to your thoughts; your thoughts are a slave to you. The Bible says, "*Keep [your mind] with all diligence*" (Proverbs 4:23). You just put up a guard there and say, "Thought, you're not getting in. You're not welcome here. You are not pure. You're not just. You're not lovely. There's no virtue. There's no praise. You're not high tone. Out! I don't want you in my mind." It's your mind. You have a right to who comes in and what comes in. You're not some helpless victim. "You know, I just can't help it." Yes, you can—yes, you can. So, there must be fortification.

Now, again, listen: you must load up on the Word of God. "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11). When you get the Word of God in your heart, you're going to find out that you're thinking God's thoughts after Him, because the Bible is God's Word.

IV. Vitalization

All right. Now, next, there must be vitalization. Look, if you will, in verse 12—look at it: "*Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes*" (Psalm 119:12). You see, even when you hide God's Word in your heart, even when you memorize verses like we're teaching these kids to do, that is still not enough. You have to take the Word of God that you've put in your heart and ask God to vitalize it—to ask God to make it real to you, ask God to teach you. Facts alone are not enough—even Bible facts. You cannot separate the Word of God from the God of that Word. And so, you come to God, and you say, "Now Lord, it's not just that I have memorized some verses, but O God, teach me. Vitalize it. Make it real in my heart."

We all have Bible teachers who teach us, and it's good to have Bible teachers for a while, but there comes a time when we ought not to be dependant upon some other Bible teacher. There was a man who was being disciplined by another man named Charlie. And, Charlie was a deep, devoted Christian, and Charlie had unusual insight into the Word of God. And, Charlie was tutoring this man, and discipling this man, and teaching him. And, one day this man was by himself studying the Bible, and he came

against something that he just couldn't understand. And, he thought, "Oh, what does that mean? I just, boy, I wish Charlie were here—I wish Charlie were here." And, he said the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, "Why don't you ask Me? I'm the One who taught Charlie." Listen, that's what he's saying here: "*LORD: teach me*"—"teach me" (Psalm 119:12). Take that word that you've fortified yourself with, and then ask God to vitalize it and make it real in your heart, because it's not just simply determination; it is not just simply fortification—it is life, the life of God, in you.

V. Verbalization

Next step—number five: verbalization. Look, if you will, in verse 13: "*With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth*" (Psalm 119:13). Keep the Word of God constantly on your tongue. Verbalize it. Day in and day out, be speaking the Word of God. Possession and confession are vitally linked. When you speak the Word of God... There's something about putting the Word of God... The Bible told of Joshua: "The Word of the Lord shall not depart out of your mouth" (Isaiah 59:21). It moves from your heart to your lips and then from your lips back to your heart again. And, and, as you speak the Word of God, sing it, pray it, share it... And, as I told you this morning, the more of God's Word you share, the more of it that is going to stick to you.

It's what the Bible calls in Revelation chapter 12 "*the word of [our] testimony*" (Revelation 12:11). And, it says there, concerning that old dragon, "*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*" (Revelation 12:11). What is the word of our testimony? "Well," you say, "it's what Jesus has done for me." No, friend, this book is our testimony, the word of our testimony. It may include what Jesus has done for you, but I think what he's talking about there is the word of our testimony, which is the Word of God. Verbalize it. Speak it. Share it. Sing it. Quote the Scripture to yourself. I find myself, when a temptation comes to me, if I will vocally, vocally verbalize the Word of God, it...there's something about it that Satan cannot stand.

VI. Appreciation

Next, number six: appreciation. Look, if you will, in verses 14 through 16: "*I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes*" (Psalm 119:14–16). Now, what is this? Just simply fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know what an impure mind is? You know what a dirty mind is? A dirty mind is a mind that has not found everything in Jesus Christ, and an impure mind is a mind that is looking for contentment in the wrong place. The reason that people have dirty minds is they've not made the discovery of the riches in Christ Jesus, and the reason

they've not discovered the riches in the Lord Jesus Christ—they have not been in the Word of God. Look at it again—verse 14: *“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate [on] thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways”* (Psalm 119:14–15). Fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, people are not saved. They drink liquor. You lecture them about drinking liquor. Listen, if you didn't know Jesus and had half a brain, you'd be a pessimist—you'd be a pessimist if you had a brain-and-a-half if you didn't know Jesus. This world's a mess. And, you think about it: What do those folks have to look forward to? They're going to get sicker; they're going to wind down to the grave, and they're going to die. And, even if they don't believe in Heaven or Hell, the best they can look forward to is they're going to rot. What do they have to look forward to? No. Why do they get drunk? That's all they've got. Why do people get off into sex, and pornography, and filth, and debauchery? That's all they've got! Friend, we have something better.

I mean, if I've just eaten a wonderful meal like my wife served me today at noon, and then you come to me with a plateful of stale crumbs, I'll say, “No, thank you. I'm satisfied.” I mean, you, when you feed on Jesus, you don't have to be in a back alley eating tin cans with the devil's Billy goats.

Appreciate the Lord Jesus. Fall in love with Jesus. Friend, if you don't fall in love with Jesus, you're not going to keep your heart pure. There's going to be a vacuum. Everybody needs satisfaction somewhere. Fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

VII. Meditation

Now, here's the last of these seven things, and this is the sum total of all of them: meditation—meditation. Look again in verse 16, verse 15: *“I will meditate in thy precepts”* (Psalm 119:15). Verse 16: *“I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word”* (Psalm 119:16). You maintain a constant communion with the Lord.

Now, I said all of these things are found in verses 9 through 16, but just take a little journey with me. Look in verse 15: *“I will meditate”* (Psalm 119:15). Look, if you will now, in verse 23: *“Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:23). Look, if you will, in verse 48: *“My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:48). Look, if you will, in verse 79: *“Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies”* (Psalm 119:79). Excuse me. *“Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight”* (Psalm 119:77). That's 77; I'll get to 97. Just hang with me, all right? But, that was a good one, wasn't it? *“O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day”* (Psalm 119:97). Look, if you will, at 99: *“I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation”* (Psalm 119:99). Look in Psalm 1...look in verse 148 of this same psalm: *“Mine eyes*

prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word" (Psalm 119:148).

Meditate, meditate, meditate. Why is this? Because there'll be a vacuum. They asked a little boy in school, "Can you spell *vacuum*?" He said, "Well, I can't spell it, but I've got it in my head." There'll be a vacuum. And, if you don't keep your mind full of something, the devil is going to fill that vacuum. And so, you just—you just—meditate. You load up on the Word of God.

Do you know what the word meditate literally means? It has the idea of chewing the cud. Now, I'm not a farm boy. I wasn't raised on a farm, but I've done a little reading. I saw three cows one day. A cow will go out in the field and load up on alfalfa, and clover, and grass. And, the cow has four stomachs, and he just stores that stuff down there somewhere—she does. And, when Bossy gets ready, goes and lies down under a shade tree, and Bossy will say, "Alfalfa, please," and up comes alfalfa. Bossy will chew that alfalfa, and swallow it down, and say, "Clover, please," and up comes clover. And, she just chews the cud, just a wad of grass, getting all the sweet juice out of that grass—chews it over and over again.

Meditation is also kind of like a song. Have you ever had a song that you just can't get out of your mind? And, all day long... The Word of God ought to be like that.

I've used this illustration before. You become—when the Word of God is like that in your heart and in your mind; you're meditating—you become a second-nature Christian. I believe three or four weeks ago, I used this illustration. I bought a little Volkswagen automobile one time back in the 60s, and you shift gears in that automobile. I loved it. It was a fun little car to drive. And, you know, going around the corners, you shift down when you slow down, and so forth. When you get that car, all you're thinking about is shifting those gears. You know, *dah, dah, dah, dah*—you're just thinking about it. But, after you've had it about a year, you never think about it. You're just shifting those gears up and down, up—never even think about it. That's second nature—just second nature. I'm telling you, folks, when you get the Word of God in your heart and in your mind—you load up on Jesus—you'll become a second-nature Christian. What I mean: you just live that way—you just live that way. You are meditating on the Word of God.

Conclusion

Now, don't you tell me that these seven things won't work, because I'm going to tell you, you don't know what you're talking about. I am telling you, as surely as I'm standing here, if you'll take these seven principles and apply them... It's not that Adrian is saying it. God says, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word*" (Psalm 119:9). "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11).

And teenagers, please listen to me: keep your hearts; keep your minds. Dads, keep

that garbage out of your home. You say, “Well, they’re the best movies.” They’re not the best movies; they’re the worst movies. And, don’t you sacrifice the purity of your children upon the entertainment altar. Keep your hearts and minds. I’m not saying that you can’t have some fun. The Bible is full of fun. Your home ought to ring with laughter. But, a holy marriage, a clean life—it’s of the highest value next to Heaven. Don’t let the devil put a claw in your brain. Don’t let him do it! Moms and dads, let’s keep our kids clean by being clean and sharing with them the Word of God.

Father, thank You for Your Word. And, I pray, dear God, that You’ll help us to take these seven steps and, Lord, that it be real—that tonight, somebody would go out of here with...and say, “I’m going to have that purification. I’m going to be clean tonight. I’m going to be as clean—I’m going to be as clean—as the driven snow, whiter than snow. I’m going to be clean tonight. And then, I’m going to determine to stay clean. And then, I’m just going to fortify my mind with the Word of God. And Lord, I’m going to ask You to vitalize it. Lord, make it real. Teach me what it means. And, O Lord, I’m going to find my joy in You, because my heart is hungry. And Lord, all the day long I’m going to be meditating in Your Word. I’m going to be verbalizing it and thinking on it all the day long.” Father, I just pray that You’d cause this to be true in my heart and in our hearts. And, in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Keeping Your Thought Life Clean

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 1, 1991

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119: 9–16

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”*

PSALMS 119:9

Outline

Introduction

I. Purification

II. Determination

III. Fortification

IV. Vitalization

V. Verbalization

VI. Appreciation

VII. Meditation

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word and turn to Psalm 119 tonight. I want to talk to you tonight about your thought life. My heart has been broken—literally broken—as I’ve been reading the news lately and I see the filth that has been poured out upon this nation. I guess the episode with Magic Johnson brought it to a head, in my heart and in my mind. And, the debauchery, the filth, the immorality—all that is being discussed in America today, things that are talked about with children that, in my estimation, ought not to even be discussed among adults... And, I’m grieved. It seems as though a sewer has broken open over America. And, how are people going to keep their thought life right?

I thank God that—and I don’t say it boastfully; I say it gratefully—that God has kept me morally pure and I went to the marriage altar a virgin. I married a virgin, and I’m grateful for that. As far as I’m concerned, I’d rather eat dirt than willingly sin—and especially in that area. But, we’re living in a world that is polluted—and I’m not talking about the pollution of air, but I’m talking about the pollution of our souls and the souls of our children. The immorality, the debauchery, the casualness with which the sacredness of sex is treated... As a matter of fact, I’m going to be bringing a message on that entire subject perhaps on a Wednesday night because of just the sensitivity of the subject—

maybe announce it ahead of time and let you bring your kids in if you want to. But, it needs to be frank thought. But, I'm not going to be talking so much about what is wrong. I could tell you what is wrong. I could paint the picture. I could read from the news magazines, the newspaper, and I don't even want to do that. I think if you are aware and alive and breathing, you know what I'm talking about. I don't even need to catalog it. It's just an avalanche of filth.

Now, it may not make any difference to you, but friend, it makes a big difference to me. You know, a child—a child—delights in what he has. A youth delights in what he does. But, a mature person delights in what he is. And, the thing that I desire to be is a man with a pure heart. I hope you desire to have a pure heart, to live a clean and a holy life. Now, that's not easy. As a matter of fact, when man fell, not only did he fall spiritually; he fell mentally and morally. And, just as the earth became a garden of weeds when Paradise was lost, man's mind has become a garden of weeds. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to remember a filthy store than it is a verse of Scripture—how much easier it is to remember something crude and vile rather than something pure and holy? That's because we live with a principle that is called “the flesh” and we have a proclivity for those things.

Now, I was reading a little book the other day, and I brought it tonight. I just want to read you a paragraph out of it. It talks about your little child, your little grandchild, or your little newborn baby, and I'm sure you won't like what I'm about to read: “Every baby”—and, by the way, the Minnesota Crime Commission released this statement—“Every baby starts his life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny him these wants, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous if he were not so helpless. He is, in fact, dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. Children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, every child would grow up a criminal.” Now, you may not believe not, but that is true. *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray [speaking lies] as soon as they [are] born.”* (Psalms 58:3) There is in us a proclivity. Man takes to sin like a fish takes to water.

Now, we train it out of us, and we somehow hold it down just a little bit, but there is in us something that is very unlovely and very un-Christ-like. And, it begins with the thought life. If your thought life is not cleansed, then, my dear friend, your life is going to be a filthy life. We need to capture the thought life, because, you see, in order to change your actions, you have to change your attitudes. There has to be mental purity before there can be moral purity.

Vance Packard has written a book called *The Hidden Persuaders*, and he says that ninety percent of the things that we buy are based on emotions and impulse. Now,

that's what the advertisers know: ninety percent of what you buy is based on either emotion or impulse. And so, all of Madison Avenue are putting in what they call "hidden persuaders" to get us to buy into whatever the product is they want us to use. And, if you don't believe that this is true, you tell me why the advertisers will spend one-half million dollars to advertise one minute during the Super Bowl—one-half million dollars for sixty seconds—because they know how to persuade through impulse and to persuade through emotion to separate you from your dollar.

Now, it all begins in the mind. You've got to control your mind. People have tried to capture their thought life. And, they searched in caves, and deserts, and remote islands, and jungles, and mountain peaks, and they have sat, and they have stood, and they have lain prostrate, and they have swung from ropes, and they have done everything they can do to capture the thought process, because they know "*as [a man thinks], so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7) A little boy was asked to complete this proverb: "Cleanliness is next to..." And, you know the answer. But, he said, "Cleanliness is next to impossible." And, I think that's true: it is next to impossible. As a matter of fact, I believe it is impossible apart from God, "*but with God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19:26)

Now, having said all of that—and I don't want to try to paint any more of a sorry picture. You know the problems that people face today—I want to show you from God's Word a recipe for living a good, clean, honorable life and for capturing your thought life and holding your thought life captured for the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at the scripture here—Psalm 119; I begin with verse 9 and read through verse 16: "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.*" (Psalms 119:9–16) And, in these passages—in these verses—we have seven steps to a clean thought life, a clean moral life.

I. Purification

Step number one is purification. Look at it in verse 9: "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*" (Psalms 119:9) Now, first of all, if you would—if you would—have a clean thought life, you must get your mind clean to begin with. I mean, the way to live a clean life is to start with a clean mind. So, you've got to cleanse your mind to begin with. Now, the Bible says here, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*" (Psalms 119:9) Do you see the word way? The Hebrew word has the idea of a rut—like a pathway that has a groove in it. People

today—and especially many young men today—have a dirty groove in their mind.

I have worked construction jobs. You know, people think that preachers don't know what's going on. They think that we live in an isolated world and we don't know what the world is like out there. But, I have worked around men long enough, working with my hands doing construction and so forth, to know that there are certain men—and I've been in high school with certain boys the same way, and in college—who can take almost anything and turn it into a dirty joke. Have you ever been around a person like that—can take almost anything and somehow they will turn it and they'll put something filthy, they'll put some insinuation, some little twist, on it? Have you ever been around people like that? Am I... Anybody know anybody like that? Let me see your hand. You guys, yes. They're out there. That is, their mind is just in a rut—in a rut. That's what he's talking about. How can a young man get out of this rut that he's in? Well, he's got to get out of this muddy rut by, first of all, just cleaning up his mind. There... He has to get his mind purified.

And, what's going to purify his mind? Well, the Word of God, first of all, is going to cleanse your mind. Look—look at it: *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”* (Psalms 119:9) Now, the Bible teaches that the Word of God is like a washbasin: you can actually come and wash yourself in the Word of God. As a matter of fact, the Bible speaks of *“the washing of water by the word.”* (Ephesians 5:26) And, Jesus said in John chapter 15 and verse 3: *“[you] are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”* (John 15:3) And, the word *clean* is the word we get our word *catharsis* from. That's the Greek word. “You get a catharsis from the word which I have spoken unto...” (John 15:3) This book has a way of cleansing you. Why? Because, of course, it points you to forgiveness; it points you to the blood of Christ. It has a way of just washing you and cleansing you. Now, if you want to keep your thought life right, first of all, take the Word of God and use the Word of God as a cleansing agent. Let the fresh breezes of Calvary and the double detergent of the blood of Christ revealed in this Word just come and wash you and make you clean.

And, it will work. As a matter of fact, I was in a particular town, went into a bookstore, and I was preaching in that city. I stepped into the bookstore and opened a book, and in that book I saw something so vile, so filthy. I wasn't prepared to see it. It wounded my mind. It wounded... I cannot tell you how bad I felt at what I saw in that book. It just wounded me. It did something to me. I went to my room. I got on my knees, and I said, “O God, my mind has been wounded. My consciousness has been defiled. And Lord, I want you to cleanse my mind. I want you to take this out.” And, my dear friend, I turned to the Word of God, began to read, and began to claim the promises in God's Word, and God cleansed my mind. I don't know how to explain it to you, but I felt the

oppression go. I felt cleansing come. I got up off of my knees, and I felt that that defilement and that filth... I can remember it intellectually now, but I don't feel the same way about it when I saw it. I was cleansed by the Word of God.

Now, my dear friend, there's no way that you can live clean until you get clean. And, there's no man, no woman, no boy, no girl here tonight who cannot be absolutely as clean, as pure, as the driven snow through the Word of God. *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."* (Psalms 119:9) And so, number one: You're going to have to have what I call a "purification" to begin with. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus Christ just coming into your life and doing a housecleaning? Just picture Jesus just coming to your home that you live in, your life, and just doing a housecleaning—I mean, just scrubbing out, cleaning out, throwing out just until you're clean. Nothing between my soul and the Savior—if you're not that way, you need to get that way and, dear friend, to be clean and pure and let Him just obliterate everything.

II. Determination

Now, after that purification, there needs to come something right on the heels of that, and that is a determination. Look, if you will, in verse 10: *"With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments."* (Psalms 119:10) How easy it is to wander! How easy it is to just let your mind become a garden of weeds! How easy it is to get this filth in your heart and in your mind! And, you're going to have to say, "I am determined. By the grace of God, I will not defile myself."

Do you know the scourge of the twentieth century? It is half-hearted Christians. My dear friends, if you, in this twentieth century and in this decade, do not absolutely determine with all of your heart you're going for God, you're going to go down. Let me give you some verses. James chapter 4 and verse 8: *"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh [unto] you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, [you] double minded."* (James 4:8) The word *double-minded* actually means "two-souled." It's a way to spiritual schizophrenia. Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 29: *"But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul."* (Deuteronomy 4:29) James 1:8: *"A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."* Daniel 1:8: *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself."* All of these verses are telling us the same thing: *"With my whole heart have I sought thee."* (Psalms 119:10)

I've told you before, my dear friend: a few big decisions will help you with a lot of little decisions. I mean, you just make up your mind, "I will not read that. I will not do that. I will not say that. I will not." "Well," you say, "Are you bragging on yourself? Is that self-sufficiency?" Oh, no, my dear friend, it is the threshold to a God-sufficiency, but

you're going to have to make a decision.

What do these businessmen do who travel? They go up into a Holiday Inn or one of these other hotels—they go up there, and there, on that...sitting right in front of them is a television. And, on top of that television there's a little thing. All they have to do is just go up there and punch a button, and nudity, eroticism, profanity, ungodliness, sexual immorality is right there for them to look at. Now, his wife is home. His kids are home. There he is in that room—bored, perhaps—alone with himself, and there's that filth. Downstairs is a lounge. Downstairs are other women now who are working and traveling away from their spouse, and away from their husband, and so forth. And, here's this man—he's lonely and so forth. And, here are all these impulses. How is he going to stay pure? My dear friend, he is not unless he makes up his mind he will not—he will not.

When I go into a hotel room, I don't have to make up my mind, "Am I going to pure or not? Am I going to watch that or not?" Friend, I have already made up my mind: "I am not—I'm not!" I don't have to say, "Shall I or shall I not?" I won't. I'm not bragging on myself. God knows I'm subject to failure. That's not what I mean. But, my dear friend, I am determined that I will not. Have you done that? Young man, businessman, young lady, have you said, "With my whole heart I've sought you. Lord, let me not wander from thy commandments"? First of all, there's purification: get your heart right. Then, there's determination: by the grace of God, it will stay right.

Years and years ago, I read about the little ermine that women wear today to make coats out of. And, by the way, you know, there are those today don't want you to wear coats. They're more holy than God. God made the first fur coat for Adam. Somebody out there likes fur. That's good. But, the little ermine—the little ermine—when they used to catch them in the wild, one of the things they would do would be to dab dirt around the lair, the den, that the little ermine would live in. They live in little holes in the ground. And, when the hunter would come and the dogs would chase the ermine, he would run to his lair. And, when he would come to that lair and see that dirt, that filth, around the mouth of his den, and know that his coat was snow-white, he would turn and face those dogs and die rather than defile himself. We need more of the spirit of that ermine. You see: *"With my whole heart"*—*"With my whole heart..."* (Psalms 119:10)

III. Fortification

Now, here's a third thing: my dear friend, not only must there be this purification and this determination, but, you see, that's not enough. There has to be, my dear friend, a fortification. You've got to have something on the inside. It's not just enough for you to say, "I want." That's just sheer humanistic good intention and will-worship. But, see how wise the Word of God is. So, go to verse 11: *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I*

might not sin against thee.” (Psalms 119:11) Now, you’ve got—you’ve got—to determine that you’re going to live right, but you don’t have what it takes. And so, therefore, there has to be...you have to fortify yourself with the Word of God. And, God’s word, sir, must be hidden in your heart—not in a dresser drawer, not in your suitcase, not in a trunk somewhere. God’s Word has to be hidden in your heart.

And, that’s the reason that you must begin your day with the Word of God. That’s the purpose for daily Bible reading—to put the Word of God in your heart. It doesn’t matter how precious this Word of God is. My dear friend, if it’s on the bottom of the ocean, it wouldn’t matter whether it’s a gold nugget or a seashell. It does you no good if it’s on the ocean floor unless somehow you get it into your possession. Now, you’ve got to get the Word of God in your heart.

Now, how does the Bible—how does the Bible—keep you from thinking these impure thoughts? Well, it’s very simple: as I’ve told you many times, you can’t think two things at one time. And, the Bible says in Philippians chapter 4, verse 8 and 9: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just...whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue...if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”* (Philippians 4:8–9) That’s it! Why do you put the Word of God in your heart and in your mind? Because, as you read the Word of God, that determines your attitudes, and your attitudes determine your actions; your creeds determine your deeds. You’ve got to get the Word of God in your heart. And so, it’s just vital that you do this.

IV. Vitalization

Now, wait—you’re still not finished. First of all, purification. Secondly, determination. Thirdly, fortification—just, I mean, load up on the Word of God. But, you know, if you read the Word of God like a robot, that’s not going to do you any good. “Fifteen minutes a day will keep the devil away”—oh, no. You’ve got to go on to look in verse 12 now: *“Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.”* (Psalms 119:12) You see, my dear friend, this fortification has to be married to a vitalization. God has to take the Word of God and vitalize it and make it real. Bible reading, apart from prayer and apart from the Holy Spirit, is not going to do you any good.

I suppose I pray this prayer more than anything else about my Bible study: I mean, when I’m preparing a sermon and doing my quiet time or whatever it is, I’m saying, “O God, teach me. O God, teach me. O God, teach me. O God, teach me. Make it real. Vitalize it.” Black words on white paper are not going to do you any good, my dear friend, but the Word of God brought home by the Holy Spirit as you cry out to God for knowledge and say, “O my God, teach me. Show me your Word.” And, when you do

that, my dear friend, the Word of God becomes alive to you. Study it. Vitalize it. Let God be the teacher and say, “I wish Pastor Rogers would explain this to me.” Well, dear friend, you get the One in your heart who teaches me, and He’ll teach you—He’ll teach you.

V. Verbalization

Now, here’s the next thing: not only must you vitalize it, but, my friend, look, you need to verbalize it. Look, if you will, in verse 13: “*With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth*”—“*with my lips.*” (Psalms 119:13) You see, look, once, dear friend, you have that purification and that determination, and then you get that fortification, you get the Word of God in there, and then you get that vitalization, and God makes it real to you, then what do you do with it? Just stuff it? No, my friend. Share it. You see, you get around somebody who’s prone to tell a dirty story, you start sharing scripture with them, you’ll head them off at the pass—you’ll head them off at the pass. They’ll say, “Hey, that’s not... That guy won’t think what I’m about to tell him is funny.” I mean, you just be so full of the Word of God.

Every preacher has kind of a head start. I’ll tell you what it is: he gets to preach the Word of God. And, in order to preach it, he has to study it and he has to pray it in; and then, he gives it out. Here’s a wonderful secret: the more of God’s Word you give away, the more will stick to you—the more you give it away. That’s the way it is with anything. You want to remember it? Tell it—tell it. Share it. And, the Scripture is so wonderful in this way: when you find yourself verbalizing the Word of God, you’re sharing with somebody else the Word of God, sharing with your children, sharing with your wife, sharing with your neighbor, sharing with your partner—whoever it is, when you’re sharing the Word of God—it moves from your heart to your lips and then back to your heart again. And, it just gets reinforced and reinforced as you verbalize it. You need to keep the Word of God on your lips. You need to sing the Word of God. You need to say the Word of God. You need to share the Word of God. Just keep on speaking the Word of God. The Bible calls this “*the word of [our] testimony.*” (Revelation 12:11) And, you know, over there in the book of Revelation, chapter 12, it says of the devil, “*And they overcame him [with] the word of their testimony.*” (Revelation 12:11) The Word of your testimony is not just how Jesus saved you. Now, He saved you through the Word of the testimony. The Word of the testimony is the Word of God. This is the Word of your testimony. This is what saved you. This is what gives you victory over the devil.

VI. Appreciation

Now, I want to say, next of all and number six: not only do you need to verbalize the Word of God, but look, if you will, in verse 14. There needs to be not only verbalization,

but appreciation. Look in verse 14: *“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.”* (Psalms 119:14) Look in verse 16: *“I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.”* (Psalms 119:16) Just appreciate it. Delight yourself in it.

Do you know what an impure mind is? An impure mind is basically a dissatisfied mind. Everybody’s trying to find satisfaction. Well, find that satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s no good for us to tell kids, “Don’t do this, and don’t do that,” and “That’s no fun,” and “Don’t do this, and you ought not to do that.” That’s all negative. Let them find their riches in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, there came into my possession a while back a pornographic book that I got through counseling. It belonged to someone that shouldn’t have it, so it was turned over to me. So, I put it in the drawer, and I said to myself, “I don’t want that in my drawer. I’ll get rid of it.” But, I said to myself, “I don’t want that in my garbage can either.” So, I put it in my car, and I went down here to the church with it last week, laid it on my car seat. When I came back out and looked—and there it was, right on my car seat—I said, “That’s not a good place for that.” So, last Wednesday night, leaving the church, Brother Bob, I stopped between here and Whitten Road. You know where I stopped? Right at the sewer. I took that book and down the sewer it went. And, I thought to myself, “That’s a good place for it—right down in there.” I didn’t want to put it in this garbage. I didn’t want to put it in my garbage. I didn’t want to put it anywhere. I hope it’s biodegradable. I think it is because it’s like everything else that goes in the sewer. And, dear friend, that’s exactly where I felt that it belonged. When I saw that...I don’t know how to describe it. Again, I thought to myself, “How pathetic that there’s a person who does not know and people who do not know what we have in Jesus Christ.” Hey, I don’t envy Magic Johnson before he got AIDS—I don’t. I don’t envy Hugh Hefner. I don’t envy Madonna. I don’t envy Johnny Carson. I don’t envy... Do you think there’s a God listening to me? I pity them. I pity these people. They don’t understand what we have in Jesus Christ.

Oh, my friend, look: *“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches... I will delight myself in thy statutes.”* (Psalms 116:14–16) That’s not second best. Friend, God’s not a cosmic killjoy. He’s not somebody—every time He sees someone, every time He sees somebody having fun, moves in to break up the game. Oh, no. You find your all in the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s where the joy is.

VII. Meditation

Now, last of all, let’s bring it all together, and this last thing is the most important, I think, or the capstone of all of it. Here’s what draws it together. You see, after you have this purification, you get your heart clean. Then, you have this determination: you say, “By God’s grace, I’ll stay clean.” And then, you have this fortification: you begin to load up

on the Word of God. And then, you have this vitalization: you say, “Now God, make it real to me. Teach me what it means.” And then, you have this verbalization: not only is the Word coming in, but the Word begins to come out. And then, that leads to this appreciation, this joy, that you find in the Lord. But, here’s the last thing—and it is meditation. Look, if you will, in verse 15: *“I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.”* (Psalms 119:15)

Now, what is meditation? Well, meditation is kind of like a tune that you can’t get out of your mind. Have you ever heard a little ditty, a little tune, and just go ’round humming it all day long? That’s kind of what meditation is. It’s something that just wells up in you, as you ingest the Word of God, and God vitalizes the Word, and the Word just gets in you and it stays in you, and you become what I want to call a “second-nature Christian.” Now, what I mean by a “second-nature” is... Have you ever done things just kind of automatically?

I remember when I first bought a Volkswagen back in 1962—61. I bought a Volkswagen. I loved it. It’s a great little car. And, I’d been driving a car with an automatic transmission. Volkswagen has that transmission down there, and you shift gears. And, I loved driving that little Volkswagen ’round, just shifting those gears. But, when I first got into it, I had to learn how to shift those gears. I had to concentrate. You know, “this is first, second, third, fourth, first, second, third, fourth. Here’s reverse.” And, you just had to kind of concentrate on that. You had to learn how to do it. Now, of course, some remember the day before the automatic transmissions at all. But today, a stick shift is a little bit of a novelty. And, you get in there, and you have to push in that clutch and shift gears and so forth, and you shift down when you go ’round a corner. And, it’s kind of fun—kind of fun—to drive a little car like that and shift those gears as you go through the change. And, that’s why some of these guys buy these sports cars. But, you know, after you drive a sports car for a while... And, of course, a Volkswagen is no sports car; that’s as close as I ever got was a Volkswagen Bug. You know, life’s unfair. About the time you can have the kind of car you want, it doesn’t make any difference.

But anyway, it’s kind of fun to drive that thing. But, you know, after you drive one long enough, you never think about shifting those gears. Isn’t that right? You never think about it. It’s just automatic. You can just be doing anything else. You’re just shifting those gears. You gear down. You go around a corner, gear up, and so forth. It’s just automatic. You just do it—you just do it. Now friend, that’s what a second-nature Christian is. You get the Word of God down in your heart, it so saturates your mind, it so fills you, you’re so a part of the Word of God, you don’t even stop to think, “Now, what does the Bible say about this?” Or, “What does the Bible say about that?” You just do right—just do right. You just... It’s a part of you because you are meditating on the Word of God. The Word of God is down there in your conscious mind and also in your

subconscious mind.

It's amazing how much the Bible has to say about meditation just in this one chapter. Look, if you will, in verse 23: *"Princes [did] also...sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes."* (Psalms 119:23) When you get the high muckety-mucks against you, if you've got the King of kings for you, you're still all right. Look, if you will, in verse 48: *"My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved...I will meditate in thy statutes."* (Psalms 119:48) Why don't you underscore that? Why don't you say, "That's my verse"? *"I will meditate in thy statutes."* (Psalms 119:48) Look, if you will, in verse 97: *"O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day."* (Psalms 119:97) Look, if you will, in verse 99, you kids in college: *"I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation."* (Psalms 119:99) Look, if you will, in verse 148: *"Mine eyes prevent the night watches"—that is, they anticipate the night watches—"that I might meditate in thy word."* (Psalms 119:148)

I've told you before, almost every night before I go to bed, I try to get a verse of Scripture, put it in my heart and mind, and just go to sleep thinking about it. I kind of look forward to it. I'll just get a verse and go to sleep thinking about it. It's just a good way to go to sleep. It's amazing what you can learn while you're asleep just meditating on the Word of God. Sometimes I'll wake up with a verse just all even outlined in my mind after having meditated on it when I go to sleep. And friend, it's that meditation—it's that Word of God just going through you, and through you, and through you.

Conclusion

Now listen: *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?"* (Psalms 119:9) He's not going to make it in this filthy, sex-saturated society apart from the Word of God. But oh, if he'll take the Word of God—let the Word of God just clean him up; and then determine by the grace of God that he will stay clean; then begin to load up on the Word of God; then ask God, "Now Lord, take this Word and make it real to me"; and once God makes it real to you, begin to share it with other people; and find your joy in the Lord Jesus Christ; and meditate day and night in the Word of God, you'll stay clean, you'll stay pure, and then God will use you, because, my dear friend, God won't use a dirty vessel—God won't use a dirty vessel. I don't even like to wash my feet in a dirty vessel. *"Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD."* (Isaiah 52:11) Clean yourself up with the Word of God, the blood of Christ, and let God keep you clean.

Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. Father, I pray tonight that you'd help us all in this day to get clean and to stay clean. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

The Path to Personal Purity

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 27, 1982

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:9–16

*“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”*

PSALMS 119:9

Outline

Introduction

- A. Education Is Not the Answer
- B. Environment Is Not the Answer
- C. Effort Is Not the Answer
- I. A Cleansed Mind
- II. A Committed Mind
- III. A Conditioned Mind
- IV. A Controlled Mind
- V. A Courageous Mind
- VI. A Contented Mind
- VII. A Contemplating Mind

Conclusion

Introduction

Psalm 119—will you turn to it? Today we are thinking on “The Pathway”—or, “The Path”—“to Personal Purity”—“The Path to Personal Purity.” The section of this 119th Psalm that I’m reading to you begins with a question: *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”*—and then, the answer—*“by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word”* (Psalm 119:9–16).

My friends, to be happy in the Christian life, and to be successful in the Christian life, and to be useful in the Christian life, and to be victorious in the Christian life, you must be pure. Now, do you have a desire to be pure? Do you know what a little child delights in? A child delights in what it has. A youth delights in what he does. A mature adult

delights in what he is. The more mature you are the more you will desire to be something—not just to have something or to do something, but to be something. And, that something that you will want to be is to be pure, for the Bible says, “*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5:8). I’d like to be so pure that if they dropped me in the flames of Hell, I’d see God. “*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5:8). They’ll see God in every circumstance, no matter what happens to them. No matter what the problem, those who are pure in heart will see God. They will know the unknowable; they will do the impossible. They will see the invisible. How important it is that we are pure!

As I was preparing this sermon, I thought about that song that we sing:

*Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole.
I want Thee to come and to live in my soul.
Break down every idol, cast out every foe.
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*

—JAMES L. NICHOLSON

Do you want to be pure? Many of you—many of you—are failing in your Christian life, and it’s because you are not pure. And, it’s hard to be pure in this day and this age. As I said to this television audience a few moments ago, it seems as though a sewer pipe has broken on America. It seems as though there is a floodtide—an avalanche—of filth and debauchery that has come upon America. You turn on the television, and there it is on the television. You pass the newsstand—there it is on the newsstand. You pick up the newspaper, and there, even advertised in the newspaper that comes to our homes, is all of this filth, and all of this wickedness, and all of this sexual suggestiveness. And, it is very hard for young people today to live pure lives. Someone has well said, “Not since Manhattan Island was sold for 24 dollars has so much dirt been sold so cheaply as it is here in America.”

How are we going to be pure when we are being bombarded by every side? I want to say, ladies and gentlemen, that mental purity must come before moral purity. A man must be pure, first of all, in his heart, in his soul, in his mind, for the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 23 and verse 7: “*As [a man] thinketh...so is he*” (Proverbs 23:7). And, many folks have forgotten how to think, and those who are thinking are doing what Zig Ziglar calls “stinkin’ thinkin’.” And, because of this stinkin’ thinkin’, they are living putrid lives. And, some people are not doing much thinking at all; they just have an “out to lunch” sign over their brain. And, they are not thinking at all, and they are just living by impulse; and rather than acting, they are reacting.

Vance Packard wrote a book called *The Hidden Persuaders*, and in that book he said, “Ninety-five percent of the purchases that people make when they buy things are based on emotion and impulse.” Now, Madison Avenue knows this; and so, Madison

Avenue is trying to control your impulses and your emotions to make you buy things to make other people rich. You know, they tell us, “Oh, what you see on television doesn’t affect you.” Do you believe that? My dear friend, how about the man who tried to murder the President? He saw a film and dwelt on it, and dwelt on it, and dwelt on it. What you see does affect you—very much it affects you. As a matter of fact, if it doesn’t affect you, tell me why the advertisers will spend a half-million dollars for one minute of advertising at the Super Bowl. For one minute they will spend a million dollars because they know that if they can capture your thought life, they can capture you.

And so, we’re thinking here today about your thought life. And, the question is, “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*” (Psalm 119:9). Now, this is not just a light question. Friend, I want to tell you, this is a pertinent question, because if you’re not clean, you’re in trouble. Not only is it a pertinent question—it is a personal question. It is talking about you, whether you are a young man, a young woman, or an adult. Not only is it a personal question—it is a pressing question. I mean, it is a question you’re going to have to face today. And, not only is it a pressing question—it is a priority question, because God wants—you’ve got desires—God demands that you be clean, that you live a pure life. I want to be pure. I want to be holy. Don’t you? Any man that knows the Lord Jesus Christ—anybody who is truly saved—wants to be pure. And, thank God there is a way to be pure. And, I want to tell you the way that you’re not going to be pure.

A. **Education Is Not the Answer**

Some people think that perhaps you can educate your mind and that will take care of it. Now, I believe in education, but, dear friend, if you educate a man in manners and not in morals, or you educate him in facts and not in manners and morals, you just make a menace to society. All he becomes is a clever devil. So, education is not the answer.

B. **Environment Is Not the Answer**

Environment is not the answer. I was interested to read that there is eight cents worth of gold in every ton of seawater. But, you’re not going to get gold plated by going swimming, and environment is not the answer.

C. **Effort Is Not the Answer**

And, effort is not the answer. It’s amazing what people have done to try to purify themselves: they’ve fasted; they’ve prayed; they’ve stood; they’ve knelt; they’ve lain prostrate; they’ve swung from ropes; they have flagellated their bodies; they have gone to mountain peaks and arid deserts and hibernated in caves, and holes, and dens. All those things are not going to make you pure.

There is, though, a way to purity. A lady had a little boy in school, and she was

seeing how good he was on his proverbs, so she asked him to finish this proverb: “Cleanliness is next to...” And, he was supposed to fill in the last word. He said, “Cleanliness is next to impossible.” And, I think that many of us, as we’ve tried to be clean and as we’ve tried to be pure, we might feel, “You know, education hasn’t done it. Environment hasn’t done it. Effort hasn’t done it. But, is there a way? Is there a pathway to personal purity?” Thank God there is—there is, indeed.

So, I want you to take the scripture now—Psalm 119. We’re going to begin with verse 9 and go right on through verse 16, and I want you to see seven steps to personal purity. Now, remember that these things deal—not primarily with the outward man, but with the inward man. God works from the inside out. God knows that you cannot purify the water by painting the pump; and so, God deals with the heart of the matter. So, let’s notice these seven steps to personal purity—“The Pathway to Personal Purity.”

I. A Cleansed Mind

First of all, there must be a cleansed mind—a cleansed mind. Look, if you will, in verse 9: “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word*” (Psalm 119:9). Now, in order to stay clean, you’ve got to get clean—I mean, you’ve got to get yourself cleaned up. Here was David, thinking about a young man who had already dipped his colors. Here’s a young man whose mind was already polluted, whose soul was already soiled. And, he says, “How is he going to get himself clean? How is a young man going to cleanse his way?” That word *way* is a very interesting word; it really means “a rut,” like a chariot wheel or a wagon wheel would make. You see, we get in a rut with our thinking. The devil gets a groove in our mind. And, there’s a habit of thinking; there’s a way of thinking—you get sort of a one-track mind, and you can’t get out of it. And, the devil just seems to have a stronghold in our mind.

How are we going to cleanse our thought life? How are we going to get all those unclean pictures that are hung on the walls, the corridors, of our mind—how are we going to get them out? Those filthy stories, those impure thoughts, those lusts, those things that have polluted the soul—how are they going to be cleansed? Thank God there’s a way. Look at it: “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*”—get out of the rut that he’s in—“*by taking heed thereto according to thy word*” (Psalm 119:9). This book is the book, dear friend, that will cleanse you.

How will it cleanse you? Number one: by revealing your sin. Number two: by convicting you of your sin. Number three: by leading you to the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son that cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Number four: by teaching you by faith to apply the cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said there in John chapter 15, verse 3: “*ye are clean through the word*”—“*ye are clean through the*

word” (John 15:3). The Bible speaks of *“the washing of water by the word”* (Ephesians 5:26). And, I want to tell you, the Word of God will bathe you and cleanse you.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to [God’s] word” (Psalm 119:9). You can be clean today through the Word of God.

Actually, Jesus, when He said, *“Ye are clean through the word”* (John 15:3), uses the word that we get our word *catharsis* from. Do you know what a catharsis is? You go to the doctor, and perhaps he wants to clean out your viscera; and so, he gives you some medicine, just to clean you out. And, that’s called a catharsis. Sometimes the psychiatrist will put you on his couch and get you to talk to him; and as you talk, and talk, and talk, he wants you to talk all of these things out of your mind, and that’s called a *catharsis*. But, not only is there one for the body and one for the mind—thank God, there is one for the spirit and one for the soul. When we are clean, there’s a catharsis, Jesus is saying, for the spirit.

You can be clean, I want to tell you, dear friend, today. I don’t care what is in your mind—God can renew your mind; God can cleanse your mind; God can walk in. I want you to picture the Lord Jesus Christ just going through your mind right now and taking all those unclean pictures down, and taking a wheelbarrow full of that filth and throwing it out, and cleansing you and forgiving you. Hallelujah! It can happen to you today. I want to tell you that the cleansing powers of Calvary can sweep over your soul today, and fresh winds of the Holy Spirit can blow through the temple of your body, and you can be clean and pure. Wonderful! Hallelujah! *“The blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son [cleanses] us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). He will cleanse your mind; He will cleanse your heart. So, step number one—have you got it?—step number one is the cleansed mind. You must start there. Get it clean.

II. A Committed Mind

But, once you get it clean, how are you going to keep it clean? Secondly, there must be not only the cleansed mind, but there must be the committed mind. Look in verse 10:

“With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Psalm 119:10). How is it, dear friend, that today we get clean and tomorrow we’re right back in the same old mess? I’ll tell you why. Why is it that we wander from His commandments? Because when we come to be cleansed, we do not continue with a whole heart.

Look at verse 10: *“With my whole heart”*—with my entire being, with all there is in me—*“with my whole heart have I sought thee”* (Psalm 119:10). Do you know the scourge of the 20th Century? It is half-hearted Christianity. Half-hearted Christianity will not do it. The Bible says in Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 29: *“But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, [and] shalt find him, if thou shalt seek with all thy*

heart and with all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29). Are you seeking for Him this morning with all your heart? Some of you couldn't care less about how pure you are—or staying pure. You're not committed. You know what the Bible says? The Bible says in James chapter 1 and verse 8: "*A double minded man is unstable in all [of] his ways*" (James 1:8). That word *double minded* literally means "two souls." Here's a man trying to face both ways at the same time. He has the world over here, and he loves the world; and he has the church over here, and he loves the church. And, he's trying to live with one foot in the church and one foot in the world. He's got just so much of the world in him that he can't be happy in church, and he's got so much of Christ in him he can't be happy in the world. He is a spiritual schizophrenic; he is a two-soul man. And, the Bible says that he "*is unstable in all of his ways*" (James 1:8). And then, James chapter 4 and verse 8 says, "*Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts, ye double minded*" (James 4:8).

Do you really want to be pure? How many in this building this morning say, "Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole. I want You to come and to live in my soul. Cast out every idol. Throw out every foe. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow"? I want to be clean this morning; I want to be pure this morning. I wonder if you do.

I was reading about the little ermine. Women have coats of ermine. And, sometimes men—royalty—wear ermine collars and so forth. (A little animal, just so big, has snow-white fur.) Do you know how they catch that little animal? They do a cruel thing. They find his den—they find his lair where he can hide—and they get filth and smear it around the opening, around the door of his den, the door of his lair. And, the dogs begin to chase the animal, and the ermine runs for his hiding place. And, when he sees that filth, rather than defile himself and smear his coat, he'll turn around and face those dogs. He had rather be stained with his own blood than stained with that filth. I wonder, do you have a desire to be that clean? Had you rather, dear friend, had you rather bleed than be defiled?

Many of us don't care much about this matter of being pure and being clean before the Lord. I tell you, it's a battle to be pure. And, if you're half-hearted, you've already lost the battle. The Bible says that Daniel "*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself*" (Daniel 1:8). Would you do that this morning? Would you say, "Not only am I going to get clean, not only am I going to have a cleansed mind, but I am going to have a committed mind. God help me, I am going to live pure"? Teenager, why don't you say that? Mister, why don't you say, "From this point on, I'm going to get right and I'm going to stay right by the grace of God"? There must be—there must be—a purpose. "*Daniel purposed in his heart he would not defile himself*" (Daniel 1:8)—Daniel chapter 1 and verse 8.

III. A Conditioned Mind

Thirdly, not only must there be that cleansed mind and not only must there be that committed mind—that whole heart—but that’s still not enough. You can clench your fist, grit your teeth, and say, “I’m going to live pure,” and walk right out and fall on your face, if that’s all there is to it. There must be something else: there must be a conditioned mind—a conditioned mind. Look, if you will, please, in verse 11: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). See, it’s one thing to be cleansed; it’s another thing to be purposeful in your heart. But, dear friend, you need a strength. God needs to recondition your mind.

And, the way that He’s going to do it is through His Word. *“Thy word”*—Thy Word, Thy Word—*“have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). Now, notice—it doesn’t say, “Thy Word have I hid in my dresser drawer.” *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart”* (Psalm 119:11). The home is a good place for the Bible. The hand is a better place for the Bible. The head is yet a better place for the Bible. But oh, my dear friend, we must learn to hide it in our heart: *“Thy word have I hid in my heart”* (Psalm 119:11). And, in order for it to get in your heart, you’ve got to read it; you’ve got to study over it. How much time are you spending with the Word of God? You wonder, “Why can’t I live pure? Why do I always cave in when temptation comes? Why can’t I be an overcomer?” Well, let me ask this question of you: How much time are you spending daily with the Word of God? Are you feasting on the Word of God? Are you reading the Word of God? Does it mean something to you? Many of you spend far more time with television than you do the Word of God, far more time with the newspapers than you do with the Word of God, far more time with the business ledger than you do the Word of God. And then, you say, “Why is it that I fail?” Listen—*“Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). That’s not what Adrian Rogers is saying; that’s what God is saying. This is the book that God has given to help you to live victoriously.

Many of you are just playing at Bible study; you never really get in. You say, “Oh, the Bible is a wonderful book.” What good is that going to do you?

I want to tell you, a dime lying on the bottom of the ocean floor and a gold Krugerrand are both of the same value as long as they are down there corroding on the ocean floor. I mean, the promises in God’s Word—what good are they unless you go down there and bring them up and appropriate them into your lives?

Do you have a quiet time? Do you have a time when you get alone with God? Do you get up every morning and saturate your soul with the Word of God and bathe your soul in the presence of Jesus? If not, no wonder—no wonder—you don’t have a pure mind. *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? ... Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:9–11).

How is getting the Word of God in your heart—how is that going to help you live a pure life? How is it going to keep you from sinning? Well, very simply—you see, what you pay attention to is what you think about. And, *“as [a man] thinketh...so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7). Now, if your mind is filled with filth and debauchery, that’s what you’re going to do, that’s what you’re going to think about. And, *“as [a man thinks]...so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7). That’s the reason the Bible says in Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest...whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). And, the things which are pure, just, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy—these are in the Word of God. And, my dear friend, as you think on these things, you begin to think God’s thoughts after Him. And, when you think God’s thoughts after Him, then your life is transformed, for *“as [a man] thinketh...so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7).

I’ve told you before, and I want to tell you again: one of the most wonderful truths that I know is this that God engineered you so that you can’t think two thoughts at one time. And so, if you are thinking what you ought to be thinking, you can’t be thinking what you ought not to be thinking. And, the only way to be thinking what you ought to be thinking is to load up on the Word of God. *“Whatsoever things are pure, just, lovely, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). *“Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11).

Fifteen college professors who taught human motivation taught what motivates people. You know, everybody wants to know how to move somebody, how to motivate somebody; they want to learn how to manipulate people, so they are constantly studying, constantly studying, “How do you get people to do certain things? How do you control behavior?” They put these 15 highly educated men in a room and said, “We want you to study. We want you to discuss. We want you to pool your knowledge together, and we want you to write a concise statement on human motivation.” They studied, and they condensed this statement after hours of study to this very terse paragraph: “What the mind attends to it considers”—that is, what you look at you have to think about—“and what it does not attend to it dismisses.” That is, if you fail to look at it and think about it, you forget it.” Now, think of it: what the mind considers—or, what the mind attends to—it considers; what the mind does not attend to it dismisses. Thirdly, “what the mind attends to continually it believes.” You just keep looking at something, keep looking at something, keep looking at something—you’ll believe it. Fourthly, “what the mind believes it eventually does.” Now that’s what 15 college professors, after they distilled it all...talking about human motivation. They are just saying, ladies and gentlemen, that what you pay attention to is finally going to determine what you are.

And, that's the reason the Bible so clearly and plainly says, *"Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Psalm 119:11).

How much of it have you hidden in your heart? How much of it do you know? "These hath God married and no man shall part—dust on the Bible and drought in the heart." Many of you are not living pure lives, and the reason that you are not living pure lives is because you are not loving the Word of God; you're not longing for the Word of God. *"Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Psalm 119:11).

IV. A Controlled Mind

Now, so, there must be a conditioning of the mind. First of all, there must be a cleansed mind. Secondly, there must be a committed mind; it must be wholehearted. Thirdly, there must be a conditioned mind. But, that's not enough. Fourthly, there must be a controlled mind, because I want to tell you, did you know that you could read this Bible and you could memorize this Bible, and if that's all that happens to you, it won't change your life? Did you know that? Did you know that you are not changed by the words of this book, but you're changed by the Holy Spirit of God, who takes these words and applies them to your heart? And, many read this book like a math book, rather than a love story. They get the words, but they don't get the music.

And so, look at the next verse—look at the next verse: *"Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes"*—*"Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:12). You see, you'll never learn this book unless God teaches it to you, and it is not enough just simply to read it. You must come to God and say, "Lord, now that I have a conditioned mind, I want it to be a controlled mind. And God, I want You to come in, and God, I want You to teach me." He goes on to say in this Psalm, *"Open thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things [from] thy law"* (Psalm 119:18). You cannot separate the God of love from the God of the Word and be successful. You come to the Lord in prayer, and then you have that quiet time. Not only must the Word of God get into you, but the Spirit of God must come into you.

One man loved to study the Bible, and every time he came to something he couldn't understand, he thought of his friend Charlie. Charlie was a great Bible studier, and he would always go to Charlie and say, "Charlie, what does this verse mean? And Charlie, what does that verse mean? Charlie, tell me about this." One day in his Bible study, the Holy Spirit said, "Why don't you ask Me? I'm the One who taught Charlie." Now friend, listen—I thank God for Bible students, and Bible scholars, and people who can teach, but the same God that teaches Bob Sorrell, and Adrian Rogers, and Tommy Lane is the God that wants to teach you. As we pray and say, *"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"* (Psalm 119:18). Teach me, O Lord, Thy statutes. God control my life. And Lord, as I get my heart cleansed, and Lord, as I get my heart

committed and as I get my heart conditioned, now Lord, let my heart be controlled. Come with Your Holy Spirit and control my thoughts and guide me into Thy truth.” As you study the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to answer these questions: number one, is there a lesson to learn? number two, is there a sin to avoid? number three, is there a blessing to enjoy? number four, is there a promise to claim? number five, is there a new thought to carry with me?

V. A Courageous Mind

O God, teach me Thy statutes. Not only must there be that controlled mind, but there must also be a courageous mind. Look, if you will, in verse 13: *“With my lips have I declared all of the judgments of thy mouth”* (Psalm 119:13)—with my lips. Not only is it in my heart—*“Thy word have I hid in [my] heart”* (Psalm 119:11). But listen, now—what is in the heart is going to show on the lips. For Jesus said, *“[Out] of the abundance of the heart”—what?—“[the] mouth speaketh”* (Luke 6:45). So, he says, *“Thy word have I hid in [my] heart... With my lips have I declared [it]”* (Psalm 119:11–13).

Do you want me to tell you how to make the Bible real to you? Do you want me to tell you how to get this and make it, boy, solid dynamite? In order to vitalize it, verbalize it—in order to vitalize it, verbalize it—start speaking the Word of God. Speak it clearly; speak it courageously. And, you’re going to find out that, as you take God’s Word and you verbalize God’s Word, as you share God’s Word, as you quote God’s Word, as you sing God’s Word, as what is in the heart finds its way upon the lips, you’re going to find out that it is going to be molding your mind in a way you never knew before. And, it will become so vital in your heart and in your life.

Friend, confession and possession are linked together. And, when you possess something, you ought to confess it. And, I want to tell you, dear friend, that impression without expression leads to depression. When you get an impression from God, express it. Be courageous. Don’t be ashamed. When it’s in your heart, it’s got to come up to your lips. *“[Out] of the abundance of the heart...”* (Luke 6:45). We have a saying—they have a saying in the country; I’m not especially a country boy, but—“what’s down in the well comes up in the bucket.” You ever heard a man use profane language? Do you know what’s wrong with a man with a profane mouth? Profane heart. You work with somebody who’s got a dirty mouth—do you know what’s wrong with him? Dirty heart—dirty heart.

“[Out] of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). And friend, when you’ve hidden God’s Word in your heart, when you have come and God has cleansed you, and then after God has cleansed you, you’ve made that commitment to the Lord—you say, “I’m going to do this with my whole heart”—and then once you’ve made this whole-hearted commitment, then you start feeding on the Word of God and

you start loading up on the Word of God. You start hiding God's Word in your heart. And, God the Holy Spirit starts to teach you God's Word, and you learn God's Word; and these truths become real to you. Then you start to express God's Word. And friend, your whole thought processes are being changed, and you're getting purified and you're learning how to live a pure life in a sinful society. And, you're going against the tide, but you're enjoying it all the way. When your heart is pure, your words are pure; and when your words are pure, your heart is pure. And, learn to be courageous. Don't be ashamed of the Lord. Speak His words—speak it. Be proud of the Lord Jesus Christ.

VI. A Contented Mind

Next, not only must there be this courageous mind—if you would be pure, there must be a contented mind. Look, if you will, in verse 14: *“I have rejoiced in the [law] of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches”* (Psalm 119:14). Look in verse 16: *“I will delight myself in thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:16). Here's a man who is content in the Lord, rejoicing, delighting in the statutes of the Lord. Have you done that? Do you know why a person is impure? Do you know why people feed on filth? They've never fed on Jesus. You see, every man wants to be satisfied. And, the person who is going to the porno palace, the person who's feeding this playboy garbage into his mouth, the so-called “sick” adult who goes to adult only movies, which are really infantile—what's he seeking for? He's saying, “Well, maybe there's satisfaction here. Maybe I can find something that will satisfy me here. Maybe I'm finding something that will titillate me or stroke me here.” And so, that's why he goes. You see, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be satisfied, but don't look for it in the wrong place. You're going to find only real satisfaction in Jesus. And, people who are purveyors of filth and feeders on trash have never really seen the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mean, suppose you just finished a wonderful meal—a big, fat, thick T-bone steak—and well, I ought not to be talking about that this time of day, but anyway—and you just finished that wonderful meal. And then, somebody meets you at the door with a plate full of stale crumbs or filth and says, “Take eat.” You'd say, “No thank you, I don't need that. I'm already satisfied.” Amen. You see, look, friend—when you've been feasting on Jesus, you don't have to be back in the back alley with the devil's Billy goats eating tin cans. You've been feasting on Jesus.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

—HELEN H. LEMMEL

You must find your contentment in Jesus, but you're going to find Jesus in the Word.

For Jesus said, “*Search the scriptures...[these] are they which testify of me*” (John 5:39). And, you’re not going to be pure until you face your eyes—put your eyes—upon Jesus, the One who’s altogether lovely, and gaze into His face in the Word of God. And, load up on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus will become so precious to you that you’ll not envy those people doing those things; you’ll pity them. You’d say, “I’d sooner eat dirt than do that,” because you have something so wonderful in Jesus.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
What the heart yearns for, by sin undermined;
I have the secret, I know where 'tis found:
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound.
Jesus is all this poor world needs today.
Blindly they strive, for sin darkens their way.
O to [pull] back the grim curtains of night,
One [look at] Jesus and all will be bright!*

—HARRY D. LOES

There must be that contentment—that contentment: “*I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies*” (Psalm 119:14). But friend, you can’t rejoice in them if you don’t know them, and you’ll not know them unless you’ll hide them in your heart and unless God the Holy Spirit, the same One that taught Charlie, teaches you.

VII. A Contemplating Mind

Now, one last thing: not only must there be that contentment—listen, friend—there must be that contemplating mind. Look in verse 15: “*I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways*” (Psalm 119:15)—to contemplate all of these other things, to be turning them over and over in your mind, to contemplate the Word of God.

How important is contemplation! How important is meditation! Look in verse 15 again: “*I will meditate in thy precepts*” (Psalm 119:15). Look in verse 23: “*Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:23). Look, if you will, in verse 48 of this same chapter: “*My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:48). Look, if you will, in verse 97 of this same chapter: “*O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day [long]*” (Psalm 119:97). Look, if you will, in verse 99: “*I have more understanding than all [of] my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation*” (Psalm 119:99). Look, if you will, please, in verse 148 of this same chapter: “*Mine eyes [anticipate] the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word*” (Psalm 119:148). And, he says, “I can just hardly wait until it is time to go to bed, so I can just lie there in the bed and think about Your Word.”

I tell you, in my own heart now—and I thank God for it—but over and over and over

and over again in my life, the Word of God is going—over and over again, just meditating on the Word of God. And, it seems like I hardly go anywhere or even sit in a conversation—I may be talking to you and thinking about the Word of God, as it's just turning over and over.

Conclusion

How sweet it is to your heart! And, the thing that keeps me going, ladies and gentlemen—it's not primarily emotion. I'm not that much of an emotional fellow. But, it is what I know of the Word of God. God's "*word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11). And, as God's Word is there, and as God the Holy Spirit teaches us that Word, and then as we learn to verbalize that Word, and then as we learn to love that Word, and delight in that Word, and meditate in that Word, then we have the answer to the basic question, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word... Thy word have I hid in [my] heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:9–11).

I want to challenge you to love this book. I want to challenge you to read this book. I want to challenge you to say, "Today I'm going to get into God's Word. I'm going to hide it in my heart. I'm going to love it. I'm going to meditate upon it. I'm going to practice God's Word." It'll change your life, and it will keep you pure from this filthy world. Oh, how we need to be pure! I want to remind you again, the Bible says, "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*" (Matthew 5:8). You'll not know God intimately if you're not pure. Dear friend, your prayers are going to be answered if you are pure. Listen, joy is going to be there in your life if you are pure. People are going to believe your testimony when you are pure. This church will be a powerful church when it is a pure church.

How are we made pure? What does the Word tell us? The Word tells us that "*the blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son [cleanses] us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Let's bow our heads in prayer.

The Seven Wonders of the Word of God

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 1, 1991

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:18, 27, 129

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”
PSALMS 119:18

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Bible Is a Supernatural Book
- II. The Bible Is a Spiritual Book
- III. The Bible Is the Savior’s Book
- IV. The Bible Is a Sovereign Book
- V. The Bible Is a Surviving Book
- VI. The Bible Is a Sustaining Book
- VII. The Bible Is a Supercharged Book

Conclusion

Introduction

Turn, please, to Psalm 119. If you know anything of the Word of God, you know that Psalm 119 deals with the Word of God. And, I love this psalm. As a matter of fact, I have a Bible in my office right near the door. And, when I walk out to preach, I can glance at that Bible, and almost always I’ll get a verse out of this psalm to hide in my heart before I come to the platform. There’s hardly a verse in this psalm will not put a fire in your heart just before you get ready to preach or to—whatever you do, if you’re going to teach or share the Word of God.

But look, if you will please, at three verses—Psalms 119, verse 18, first of all: *“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”* (Psalms 119:18) Underscore the word *wondrous*. And then, look, if you will please, in verse 27 of this same chapter: *“Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so [that I] shall...talk of thy wondrous works.”* (Psalms 119:27) Underscore again the word *wondrous*. And then, look, if you will, in the same psalm all the way over—same chapter—to verse 129: *“Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.”* (Psalms 119:129) Twice he speaks of wondrous things, and then he says they are wonderful. I want to talk to

you about what I'm going to call "The Seven Wonders of the Word of God." Now, we've heard of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and some have tried to say there's seven wonders of the modern world. I want to say there are seven wonders of the Word of God.

The great, great, great battle today is over the Word of God. That's where the battle is. And, may I say that the danger is not so much from the infidels who attack the Church from the outside. They don't bother me nearly so much. They're like woodpeckers pecking on the church, and we can see them and shoo them away. But, there are others who are on the inside—I call them "termites." They're on the inside eating away at the foundation. And, we have the infidels on the outside—the woodpeckers—and the liberals on the inside—the termites. And, sometimes I think that the termites are doing far more danger than the woodpeckers are.

As a matter of fact, there used to be a man named Robert Ingersoll, who was a very brilliant man and went up and down the land giving lectures as to why he did not believe in God. And, he would lampoon and ridicule the Bible. After a while, he stopped doing that. And, somebody asked him why he no longer did it, and he said this: he said, "There's no more need for me to do that any more, as many preachers in the pulpits are denying the Bible in the churches of our land and are accomplishing far more to destroy faith in the Bible than I could do by taking to the lecture platform." Well, the Bible is being attacked today. There are those who say, "You don't need to defend the Bible; the Bible will defend itself," and that sounds good. But, my dear friend, the Bible says also that we're to "*earnestly contend for the faith [that] was once [for all] delivered [to] the saints.*" (Jude 1:3)

John Calvin, a great theologian, said this: "A dog barks when its master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent without giving any sound." I think that's true. We would be cowards. That great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, said this: "The turning point of the battle between those who hold the faith once delivered to the saints and their opponents lies in the true and real inspiration of the Holy Scriptures." He's saying that's the turning point, that's the continental divide, that is the point of difference—what people believe about the inspiration of the Word of God. And then, the great Spurgeon went on to say, "If we have in the Word of God no infallible standard of truth, we are at sea without a compass, and no danger from rough weather without can be equal to the loss within." He was saying the same thing in another figure of speech. It's not primarily the woodpeckers—not the waves. It's the loss of direction; it's the termites or whatever the analogy is on the inside.

Now, having said that to these young preachers, I say that to myself; to every man on this platform; to every deacon here, every Sunday School teacher, every layperson

in this building. There are seven wonderful things about the Word of God that I want to share with you tonight. I love the Bible. When I began preaching as a nineteen-year-old boy, I believed the Bible was the Word of God. I still believe it tonight. I believe it even more tonight than I believed it then, and I believe it with all of my heart. I got married when I was a nineteen-year-old boy. I love Joyce with all of my heart, but I love her more today than I loved her then, and I loved her then with all of my heart. But, the more I see of the Word of God, the more convinced I am that the Bible is exactly what it says of itself—that is, that it is, indeed, a wonderful, wonderful book. I'm not finding hidden flaws; I'm finding hidden beauties, and I'm finding authentication of that which I already believed and blessing upon blessing of the book that has already blessed me down through the years. What are the seven wonders of the Word of God as I see them tonight?

I. The Bible Is a Supernatural Book

Well, first of all, wonder number one: The Bible is a supernatural book. No other book was written as the Bible was written. Now, the Bible says in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16 that *“all scripture is given by inspiration of God.”* (2 Timothy 3:16) And, the word *inspiration* is the Greek word *theopneustos* or “neustas,” however you wish to pronounce it—*theopneustos*. And, it literally means that the Scripture is God-breathed.

Now, what you're hearing tonight is my breath that makes my voice. As my diaphragm pushes upon my lungs and the air comes out of my throat, it comes over my larynx and causes my vocal chords to vibrate. And, my tongue, my teeth, my lips form sounds, and these sounds go into the air and the microphone and come into your ear. And, there are vibrations that are set up in your ear that send signals to your brain, and your brain interrupts these sounds. But, what you're hearing, really, as I speak, is my breath. I couldn't speak without breath. Now, the Bible is the breath of God. That's literally what the word means—not that God breathed into the Scriptures; it literally means that God breathed the Scriptures out. The Bible is as much the Word of God as if God were up here in a physical body speaking words. It is the breath of God.

And, that scripture—2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16—says that *“all scripture is given by inspiration of God,”* (2 Timothy 3:16) not part of it. That's the reason we believe in what I call the “verbal, plenary, inspiration of the Bible.” *Verbal*, from the Latin *verbum* or *verba*, means “word.” We believe in word-by-word inspiration—that every word of God is pure. Matthew 4:4: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”* We believe in verbal inspiration. That means word-by-word inspiration of the Bible.

You say, “Well, what's the point? What difference does it make?” Well, you see, some people say the Bible is inspired in its thoughts, not its words. Well, very frankly,

you cannot have accurate thoughts without accurate words any more. *To have thoughts without words would be like to try to have mathematics without numbers.* Words mean something. Our Lord Jesus taught that even a jot or a tittle there in the Word of God was important. And, in the original manuscripts, every line, every point, every pen stroke, every jot, every tittle was placed there by the will and the purpose of Almighty God. I believe that—the verbal inspiration of the Word of God and the plenary inspiration of the Word of God. The Latin word *plenus* means “full”—“full.” That is, it’s fully inspired. That may not be as fully inspiring.

If I had to be shipwrecked on an island, I’d much rather be shipwrecked with Romans than 1 or 2 Chronicles. There’s nothing wrong with 1 or 2 Chronicles, but some of it reads like a Hebrew telephone directory. Now, I had rather have, of course, the book of Romans. Sure, that’s fine; that’s wonderful. But, I want to tell you, 1 Chronicles is as inspired as the book of Romans. “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” (2 Timothy 3:16) And, you’ll find, as you read the Bible, three thousand eight hundred and eight times a phrase like this: “God said,” or “The Lord said,” or “Thus saith the Lord,” or “The Lord spake.” Thousands of times it says that. Now, either the Bible is the Word of God or it’s a big bundle of lies, because over and over again it says that this is what God says.

Now, having said that, somebody says, “Well, how do you know that God gave all of the Bible? If all the Bible is the breath of God, how come it sounds so different? Why... If you’re reading, for example, James, it doesn’t sound like what Paul wrote. And, if you read Peter, it doesn’t sound like James or Paul. So, if God wrote it all, why is it all so different? And, why is the language so different and the style so different if it’s all given by inspiration of God?” It’s a very interesting question.

I’ve asked Carter Threlkeld... Carter, where are you? I want you to come up here tonight. Carter is my illustration tonight. Carter, get a trumpet for me and hit a few notes, would you? Make it pretty, Carter. Thank you. Now Carter, get a trombone and hit a few notes for me. All right, thank you. Now, let’s give him a hand. Now, how many of you, if your eyes were closed, could tell the difference between a trumpet and a trombone? Let me see your hand. Most all of us. Even me—I could do that. I can tell the difference between a trumpet and a trombone. All right. Now, the trumpet has a personality of its own, has a tone, a tenor, of its own. And, the trombone has a characteristic, a personality, a tone, a temper of its own, right? But, who was playing both instruments? One man: Carter Threlkeld. You pick up the Bible, and you can see the personality, the temperament, the characteristic of the Apostle Paul. Or, you pick it up—you can see the personality, the characteristic, the temperament of Simon Peter, or the others. But, who is behind both of them? Almighty God. And, you see, as these instruments were used of this man, human instruments wrote the Bible, but behind these human instruments was

Almighty God. The Bible says, *“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”* (2 Peter 1:21)

And so, as you read the Bible, it’s a very human book. You see the prayers, the praises, the fears, the victories, the yearnings, the frustrations of the men who wrote this book. It’s marked by their personalities, yet God, in and through these men, was the One who was doing the speaking, the leading. Dr. Lewis Schaffer said of the Bible, “It is not such a book as man would write if he could because it condemns him or could write if he would because it surpasses him.” That’s a great statement. So, the Bible is a supernatural book. It’s not like any other book. Robert E. Lee—not Robert G. Lee, our former pastor; but Robert E. Lee, the great statesman and general—said, “The Bible is a book in comparison with which all others, in my eyes, are of minor importance and which in all my perplexities and distresses has never failed to give me light and strength.” That’s what Robert E. Lee said about the Word of God. It is, my dear friend, a supernatural book.

II. The Bible Is a Spiritual Book

Second wonder of the Bible: Not only is it a supernatural book, but, my dear friend, it is a spiritual book. Now, what I mean by that is that the Bible, written by the Holy Spirit, must be interpreted by the Holy Spirit. Now, revelation is God’s communication of truth to man. Inspiration, in a broader sense than the narrow sense I gave you just a few moments ago, is the recording of that revelation. But, you see, revelation and inspiration are not enough. We still need illumination to be able to understand the Word of God. And, in these scriptures that I read to you tonight, notice that they were prayers: *“[Lord,] open [my] eyes, that I may behold wondrous things [in] thy law.”* (Psalms 119:18)

I love that passage in Luke chapter 24, where the Lord Jesus, after His resurrection, was walking with two disciples forlorn and dismayed on the road to Emmaus. And, He walked with them, and talked with them, and conversed with them. And then, there’s a very wonderful part there in Luke chapter 24, verse 45: the Bible says, *“[And] then he opened their understanding.”* (Luke 24:45) My mind has camped on that verse many times. I thought, “O God, do that for me. God, do that for me.” He opened their understanding so they could understand the Scriptures.

You see, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14: *“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God...neither can he know them, [for] they are spiritual discerned.”* (1 Corinthians 2:14) What does that mean—“the natural man”? It means “the soulish man,” “the psychological man,” “the man apart from the Spirit of God”—he can’t understand the Bible. He may be able to give you the names of the kings of Israel. He may make an “A” in a history test on the Bible. He may even be able to articulate the doctrines of the Bible in his own way. But friend, he will never know the

real message of the Bible until the Holy Spirit of God turns the light on in his soul. *“The natural man [receives] not the things of the Spirit of God.”* (1 Corinthians 2:14)

That’s the reason that when we come to this book, we must come to this book and lay in the dust our intellectual pride and say, “Lord God, speak to me.” Isaiah chapter 55 and verse 7 says, *“Let the wicked forsake his [thoughts]...the unrighteous man his [ways]: and let him return unto the LORD.”* (Isaiah 55:7) Just forsake your thoughts. You put away your slide rule. You put away your microscope. You put away your intellectual pride, and you come and ask the Holy Spirit of God to teach you. This book is a spiritual book, and you’ll not rip truth out of it. God will reveal it to you or you won’t have it. I mean, you may have a perfectly inspired Word of God, but until the Holy Spirit uses it as His convicting, cutting sword, or until He illumines you as a student of it, it’ll not be real in your heart.

III. The Bible Is the Savior’s Book

Thirdly—third wonder of the Word: Not only is it a supernatural book and not only is it a spiritual book; it is the Savior’s book—the Savior’s book. I say it’s the Savior’s book, number one, because He believed it. And, it’s the Savior’s book, number two, because it presents Him. Jesus Christ is the hero of the Bible. If you read the Bible and you don’t find Jesus Christ somewhere, somehow, standing in the shadows or presented in plain view, go back and read it again, because the Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me just say—re-iterate—those two things again. First of all, Jesus was a believer in the inerrancy of the Word of God. Even the liberals have to confess that Jesus was a believer in the inerrancy of the Word of God. Jesus said in John chapter 10 and verse 35: *“the scripture cannot be broken.”* (John 10:35) That’s what Jesus Christ said about the Scripture.

And, by the way, just turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 5. I want you to see what the Lord Jesus said about the Word of God. In John chapter 5 and verse 39, Jesus said, *“Search the Scriptures; [and then you] think [that you] have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”* (John 5:39) And, by the way, what scriptures was He talking about then? The Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been written. And Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees and to others, said, *“[You] search the scriptures...[these] are they which testify of me.”* (John 5:39) Don’t ever get the idea that the Old Testament is about Israel and the New Testament is about the Church or the Old Testament is about Israel and the New Testament is about the Lord Jesus. Friend, Jesus said, concerning the Scriptures, the holy writings, that they testify of Him. (John 5:39)

And then, I want you to look down in verse 45—John chapter 5, verse 45: *“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in*

whom ye trust.” (John 5:45) Now, He was talking to Jews of His day, and when He said, “Moses,” He was talking about what we call the “Pentateuch”: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—called under one heading “Moses.” Now, Jesus believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. And then, notice what He says in verse 46: *“For [if you] had believed Moses, [you] would have believed me; for he”—Moses—“wrote of me.”* (John 5:46) You see that? Friend, that’s powerful. Now, we have people today who don’t even believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and they would laugh at the idea that Christ is in the Old Testament, in the first five books of the Bible. But, you know what? I’m going to line up with Jesus, who said that Moses wrote—He didn’t say, “Some priestly redactor wrote of me”—He said, “*He*”—Moses—“*wrote of me*”—and then, I want you to notice this: that Jesus put the writings of Moses and His sayings on the same plain—*“But if ye believe not his writings, how [should] you believe my words?”* (John 5:46–47) You see that? You see what He did? You see, He endorsed what Moses wrote, and He put what Moses wrote on the same level as His own words.

Now, turn back to the book of Luke here for just a moment—Luke chapter 24. I’m just trying to show you Jesus’s view of the Bible, because why? Well, He’s your Master, and the servant’s view of the Bible must be the same as his master’s, right? Now, look in Luke chapter 24. We’re back on the Emmaus road now. Jesus is walking along with these two forlorn disciples, and He sees that they don’t understand His resurrection. And, He says to them in verse 25: *“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”*—now, do you know what Jesus Christ would call you tonight if you don’t believe all that the Old Testament prophets said? He would call you a fool and “slow of heart.” That means “dull of hearing”—*“O fools, and slow of heart to believe [not] all that the prophets have spoken”*—and then, notice how He reasoned with them—*“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets”*—that is, He began in the Pentateuch and went right on through the rest of the Bible—*“beginning at Moses and all [of] the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”* (Luke 24:25–27)

Oh, how I would have loved to have had a tape recording of that. Can you imagine what that must have been like? To be walking along with the very Son of God, who begins with the book of Genesis and He goes right on through the Bible and He shows them *“in all the [Bible] the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27)—the Old Testament. Oh wow! You see, what I’m trying to say is, my dear friend, this supernatural book—this spiritual book—is the Savior’s book. He believed it. He said, *“The [scriptures] cannot be broken.”* (John 10:35) And, He said, *“[You] search the scriptures; for...[these] are they which testify of me.”* (John 5:39)

I want to tell you young preachers and you old deacons, Jesus is the theme, the

hero, of all of the Bible. In Genesis, He's the promised seed. In Exodus, He's the Passover Lamb. In Leviticus, He's that perfect sacrifice. In Numbers, He is that star out of Jacob. In Deuteronomy, He's the prophet that is greater than Moses. In Joshua, He is the Commander-in-chief; in Judges, the deliverer. In Kings and Chronicles and Samuel, He's the King of kings. In Ezra, He is God's temple. In Nehemiah, He is the gate to the city. In Esther, He is the One *"come...for such a time as this."* (Esther 4:14) In Job, He is the "Redeemer who will stand in the last day upon the earth." (Job 19:25) In Psalms, He's the Good Shepherd. In Proverbs, He is the wisdom of God; in Ecclesiastes, the One upon whom we attend. In Isaiah, He is the virgin-born Son of God. In Jeremiah, He is the righteous branch. He the Song of Solomon; He is the One *"altogether lovely."* (Song of Solomon 5:16) And, in the book of Hosea, He is God's Son called out of Egypt. (Hosea 11:1) In Malachi, He's *"the Sun of righteousness...with healing in his wings."* (Malachi 4:2) This book is the Savior's book.

Now, there are some who would accuse you if you love the Bible too much. You know what they will accuse you of? Too much, according to them—if you love it too much, according to them—they will accuse you of bibliolatry. You know what that means? They say, "You've made an idol of the Bible. You worship the Bible." Well, dear friend, let me tell you something: if they call your deep love for the Bible "bibliolatry," that's their problem and not yours, unless you actually worship the Bible and allow it to stand between you and Christ. But, if it brings you closer to Christ, pay no attention to them. Just keep on loving the Bible and cherish it all the more. It is the Savior's book, and because He loved it and believed it, you can love it and believe it.

IV. The Bible Is a Sovereign Book

Now, here's the fourth wonder of the Word of God: it, my dear friend, is a sovereign book—a sovereign book. Now, what I mean by that is it is the supreme authority in spiritual matters, not human reason—don't take the Bible and parade it past the bar of human judgment to see if you agree with it or not—not conscience—conscience is not the supreme authority. If you had to choose between obeying the Bible or obeying your conscience, I hope you know what you would do. (Obey the Bible.) You see, conscience is not an infallible guide. *Your conscience is like a sundial: only a true light, the sun, will make it register the right thing. Don't look at the Bible with a flashlight of human opinion.* You have to look at the Bible in the light of the Holy Spirit of God, not the flashlight of public opinion. Tradition is not the authority. Jesus warned of those, in Mark chapter 7 and verse 13, who *"[make] the word of God of none effect through [their] tradition."* (Mark 7:13)

You say, "Pastor, I don't like you calling the Bible sovereign, because God is sovereign." Yes, and the Bible says, "God says"—"God says." Let me give you a verse,

friend, that will blow your doors off. Here it is—Psalms 138, verse 2: *“for thou hast magnified thy word above...thy name.”* (Psalms 138:2) Now, you chew on that one for a while: “God has magnified His Word above His name.” (Psalms 138:2) So, dear friend, this book is a sovereign book. A man and his word may be different in this dishonest world in which we live, but God and His Word are the same. And, if you can bank on God, you can bank on the Word of God. It is a sovereign book.

V. The Bible Is a Surviving Book

I want to say the fifth wonder of this wonderful book is it is a surviving book—a surviving book. It goes on, and on, and on, and on. Matthew chapter 24 and verse 35: *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall [never] pass away.”* (Matthew 24:35) First Peter chapter 1, verse 25: *“the word of the Lord [endures] for ever”—“for ever.”* (1 Peter 1:25) When the earth becomes a cinder and the stars splinter and fade, the Word of God will be in existence. It doesn’t change. It survives.

Ever so often we’ll read in the newspapers about some new theory as to how the earth began or how the universe began and how some early man—they have found this thing or that thing—or somebody has found some hidden esoteric books and all of this thing. Ever so often you’ll read this, and then people forget about it. The Word of God just keeps on going on. I, you know, I’m so glad the Bible doesn’t agree with modern science in every instance. Why? Because if it agreed with today’s science, tomorrow it may be wrong, because science is constantly changing. You give these scientists enough time, and maybe, sooner or later, they’ll catch up with the Word of God. I’m serious about that. That’s not a cliché.

Friend, it’s an incredible book. You don’t have to be ashamed of the Bible. I mean, you don’t have to stand behind a corner and wonder, “Am I going to be an ignorant rube for believing the Bible?” My dear friend, this book is timeless. It is ultimate. It is indestructible. It is infallible. It is eternal. And, it’s not the book of the month or the book of the year; it is the book of the ages. *“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.”* (Psalms 119:89) That’s an incredible thing—that we’re holding in our hand a document that is literally millenniums old in some instances. And, here we are in the twentieth century, the atomic age, and still we’re finding help, and comfort, and wisdom from this book. *“Let God be true, [and let] every man [be] a liar.”* (Romans 3:4) Thank God for this book that is a surviving book. And, Dr. Lee—this time Robert G. Lee, not Robert E. Lee—said this concerning the Bible: “Enemy noise has not silenced one warning. The enemy’s black smoke has not dimmed one bright hope. The enemy stabs have not torn one blemish in its snow-white vesture. Infidel ink has not diluted one drop of her honey. The enemy has not plucked one petal from the Rose of Sharon, nor imposed one stain upon her purity.” I love that; I like that.

VI. The Bible Is a Sustaining Book

I want to say that the sixth wonder of the seven wonders of the Word is this: that not only is the Bible a surviving book, but the Bible is a sustaining book—not only does it survive, but it enables me to survive. As you are physically sustained by physical nutrients, you are spiritually sustained by the Word of God.

That's exactly what Jesus Christ taught in Matthew chapter 4, verse 4, when He said, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" (Matthew 4:4) Every word that comes out of God's mouth is to your spirit what bread is to your body. That's the reason that old Job said in perhaps the oldest piece of literature known to man, the book of Job—Job 23, verse 12: "*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*" (Job 23:12) That is, "If I had to choose between the Word of God and groceries, I'd have to choose the Bible." I'm afraid most of us wouldn't do that. "*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary [meat].*" (Job 23:12) It'd do most of us a lot of good if we studied more and ate less. Say "amen." You know 'tis true—you know 'tis true. It's a sustaining book.

I'm looking out here at some new Christians, some new believers. I'm looking in the face of one right now. Here's what God's Word says—1 Peter chapter 2, verse 2: "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that [you] may grow thereby.*" (1 Peter 2:2) No wonder we have so many baby Christians who remain babies. They don't get the Word of God; they're not growing.

I want to say again to both of you young men, a great Bible teacher of yesteryear was Dr. R. A. Torrey. If you have any of Dr. Torrey's books, read them. If you don't have some, buy them. Here's what Dr. Torrey said: "Oh, you may talk about power, but if you neglect the one book that God has given you as the one instrument through which He imparts and exercises His power, you will not have it. Ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are merely playing at Bible study, and, therefore, ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are mere weaklings when they might be giants—both in their Christian life and in their service." And, I've been pastor long enough of this dear church that I love with all of my heart and soul to know that a great number of our people are only playing at Bible study, and about all the real nutriment they get is when they come here on Sunday—and I'm grateful that you do. But friend, this book is a sustaining book. The older I get, the longer I live, the more I know, the more I understand the sustaining power of the Word of God.

VII. The Bible Is a Supercharged Book

I want to say the last of these seven wonderful things that I have seen in the Word of God tonight: this book that is all of these other things is, therefore, a supercharged book. I mean, dear friend, it has incredible power.

I preached several Sunday nights ago on the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. The verse that I used was John 6 and verse 63, where Jesus said, *“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”* (John 6:63) We read other books; this book reads us. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12 says, *“The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than [a] twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.”* (Hebrews 4:12) It’s quick. You know what the word *quick* means in the old King James English? It means it’s “living”—it’s “alive.” It breathes. It sings. It pulsates with power. There’s power in the Word of God. Jesus said, *“The words...I speak unto you, [they’re] spirit...[they’re] life.”* (John 6:63) It’s quick. (Hebrews 4:12) It’s powerful. *Energes*—it means that it is full of energy. Well, I’ve preached it long enough to know, friend, this book does things to people that nothing else will. I mean, there is power in this thing. I’ve seen... And, piercing—listen, it’s able to penetrate and scrutinize the innermost part of your personality. So many figures of speech in the Bible. *The Bible is called a seed because it impregnates. It’s called a fire because it burns. It’s called a hammer because it crushes. It’s called a sword because it cuts.*

Conclusion

One more time I want to tell you that the purpose of the Bible is to present Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world, and that’s the reason the Apostle Paul said, *“[I’m] not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.”* (Romans 1:16) James 1, verse 18: *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.”* (James 1:18) You young men, and to this congregation, I hope you’ll always stand in awe of this book. And, I’ve mentioned seven wonders out of seventy thousand wonders of the Word of God.

Let’s pray. Father, I thank you again for your Word. I preached to my own heart. And, I stand, dear Lord, not only in awe, but I stand humbled. And, I confess before these people my lack of study, appreciation, appropriation, application of your Word. And, I commit, dear Lord, my heart to you tonight to know it, love it, preach it, practice it, and ponder it in a better way. Please help me to do that, Lord—please. And Lord, I want to pray for these two young men tonight, O God, and for their spouses and, Lord, for those that they will minister to. Lord, help these men to be men of the Word. I pray for our church, that it might be Bible-based, and Christ-centered, and Spirit-filled. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

How to Have a Meaningful Quiet Time

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 7, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 119:97–104

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”

PSALMS 119:97

Outline

Introduction

- I. You Must Have a Proper Period
- II. You Must Have the Proper Preparation
 - A. Be Physically Alert
 - B. Be Morally Pure
 - C. Be Mentally Aware
- III. You Must Have the Proper Place
 - A. To Keep Us from Being Hypocrites
 - B. To Avoid Distraction
- IV. You Must Have the Proper Provisions
 - A. A Readable Bible
 - B. A Devotional Journal
 - C. A Prayer Journal
 - D. A Notepad for Daily Tasks
 - E. A Notepad of God’s Daily Tasks for You
- V. You Must Have a Proper Procedure
 - A. Get Quiet
 - B. Get into the Word of God
 1. Read for Quality and Not Quantity
 2. Read It Sequentially
 3. Keep Your Bible Reading Balanced
 - C. Meditate on the Word of God
 - D. Record What God Has Given You
 - E. Pray It in
 - F. Exhort One Another
 - G. Obey What God Tells You

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Word and find, please, Psalm 119? I want to begin reading in verse 97—Psalm 119. In just a moment, I'll begin in verse 97. And, by the way, you could just almost jump in any place in Psalm 119 and read a portion for the message tonight that deals with how to have a meaningful quiet time. *"Oh, how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they"—that is, "my enemies"—"are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:97–104).

Christianity is not a legal relationship; it is a love relationship. And, people who are legalists never have victory. Ten thousand *don'ts* will never make you one iota more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there are some *don'ts* in the Christian life, and there are some *dos*. But friend, it is Jesus Himself who makes you like Him. You need to spend time with Jesus Christ. Christianity is a love relationship.

Now, you cannot love someone that you do not know, and you cannot know someone that you don't spend quality time with. To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to be blessed. To know Him is to love Him. You cannot know Jesus without loving Him, and to love Him is to trust Him. You cannot trust someone you do not love. And, trust Him is to obey Him. The reason we don't obey is because we don't trust. And, to obey Him is to be blessed.

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

—JOHN H. SAMMIS

And, it begins with a quality quiet time, a daily communication with the Lord.

Now, I'm not here tonight to put you under a guilt trip. I could do that very easily, but I want to say, you could put me under one, too, because I'm certainly not holding myself up here as the paragon of excellence in anything—and especially in needing, and wanting, and desiring a better quiet time with the Lord than I have already. But, I have learned some things, and I'm going to share with you what others have taught me and also some things I've learned in my own pilgrimage about having a quality quiet time. I want to give you about five factors, and they'll be easy to remember because we'll let them begin with the letter "P."

I. You Must Have a Proper Period

First of all, you must have a proper period—that is, the right time. When should you have your quiet time? Here are two keys: number one, it should be the very best time; and number two, it should be early in the day. Now, don't give the Lord the leftovers; give Him the very best time, and that best time should be some time in the morning.

Now, I think that it takes at least a half an hour to have an effective quiet time, but some time is better than no time. So, start out with some time. And, by the way, you won't just find this time; the devil will see to that. You have to make time. You study the life of the Lord Jesus—you find that Jesus made time to be alone with the Father. He, in the midst of a very busy ministry, would withdraw Himself and be alone.

This quiet time ought to be in the morning. Psalm chapter 5, verse 3 says, *"In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up"* (Psalm 5:3). Why in the morning? Well, obviously in the morning because you're getting ready to live the day. You don't take the trip and then read the map, do you? I mean, it's early in the morning that you take your time. You don't get the car tuned after you taken the trip. You don't pray for your bread—your daily bread—after the day is over. I mean, it's very obvious that this is the prayer that unlocks the key of the morning. It's a time to get started with God. And, any athlete knows that it's the start that insures a good finish.

Now, I dare say that most of us feel we don't have time in the morning. Well, obviously we do have time if we make time. It's just a matter of determining to make time. Now, it may seem to some of you who are efficiency experts to have a quiet time is a waste of time.

But, if you were chopping wood, would it be a waste of time to sharpen the axe? If you're going on a trip and you don't know where you're going, are you wasting time when you study the map? If you're trying to read a book, are you wasting time when you turn on the light? You see, God's Word is a lamp to light the way. It's a map to show the way. It is a tool that we work with along the way. And so, it's very, very important that you make time. There must be the proper time.

The best time for me is sometime after breakfast. Now, I've told you before, while I have to wake up in the mornings and my alarm clock is generally set at 6:00 or 6:30, it meanders a little back and forth. But, I have to get up and get started, but I never want to get up. It's a resurrection for me every morning. I mean, to get the bed off my back is difficult. I mean, confession: I don't know whether that's a sin or not; it's just the way I'm wired. Now, the longer I go, the stronger I get. I mean, I'm like a steam engine. And, if I want to be alert, I have to get up and get going, because as I've told you before, Joyce is a lark, but I'm an owl. And, she's a springer, and I'm a groper. And, when I wake up in the morning, you know, I stumble into the bathroom, put my knee on the toothpaste to squeeze it, just to try to get going. So, for me to have my quiet time when I first wake up

would be just a good cure for insomnia. If I bowed my head and closed my eyes, I'm off again. And so, you know, I just have to get up and get ready. And so, what I try to do personally is bathe, shave, have breakfast, and Joyce and I'll have a prayer time together at breakfast. We'll pray for our family, and try and pray around the world, and then retire to my study. By that time, that's my best time.

Now, what I'm trying to say is it's got to be early, but it needs to be your best time—that is, when you can bring all the mental acuity that you have. So, there must be the proper period. Ask God when that time is. And, don't try to find it; make it, and you'll make it as a matter of priority.

II. You Must Have the Proper Preparation

Now, here's the second thing: not only must you have the proper period, but you must have the proper preparation—the proper preparation. And, there three things that will prepare you for a quiet time.

A. Be Physically Alert

Number one: You must be physically alert. I've already mentioned that—physically alert. Find a time when the cobwebs are out of your mind, when you can think clearly, when your juices are flowing in you body—physically alert.

B. Be Morally Pure

Number two—and this is very important: You must be morally pure and clean to have a quiet time. Do you know what quiet time is? Quiet time is fellowship with a holy God. The reason that some folks don't have a quiet time—they feel uncomfortable. And, the reason they feel uncomfortable is they don't want to look God in the face, and the reason they don't want to look God in the face is there's sin in their life.

What did Adam do after he had sinned and God came walking in the Garden? Adam fled. Before that, Adam had a quiet time with God, didn't he? I mean, Adam and God walked in the Garden; they had fellowship. That was Adam's quiet time—walking in the Garden in the cool of the day. But then, when there was sin in Adam's life, he did not want to look God in the face.

If you find in you sometimes a reluctance, maybe even a repugnance, to what I'm talking about, it's simply because there may be sin in your life. Now, you've got to have your heart clean and pure in order to have a quiet time. Now, it may be that a part of your quiet time will be to get you heart clean and pure, but you need to take yourself by the nap of the neck and do it through confession because you're foolish and wicked to pray from a wicked heart, because Psalm 66, verse 18 says, *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). Now, we quote the prayer promises. That's a prayer promise. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me"*

(Psalm 66:18).

Or again, the Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5, verses 23 and 24: *“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there [remember] that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar...go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother...then come and offer thy gift”* (Matthew 5:23–24). Now obviously, He’s talking there about the temple worship, but the principle is you can’t worship God if there’s a bad relationship in your heart that needs to be put right. So, what? You come—you come—physically alert; you come morally pure.

Well, how do you get morally pure? Does that mean you can’t have a quiet time? No, it just simply means that you search your heart at the very beginning of the quiet time and say, “O God, search my heart. Try me, and see if there be some wicked way in me” (Psalm 139:23–24). And, if God the Holy Spirit points that out, 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our [sin]”*—He’s what?—*“faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* There’s no reason that any of us should not be as clean, as pure, as the driven snow because of that. The blood of Jesus that we’ve been singing about tonight—1 John 1:7—*“the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanseth us from”*—what?—*“all sin”*—not *some*; *all*. And, don’t you let the devil intimidate you by some failure in the past, because you may, through the precious blood of Jesus and by the grace of God, be clean.

C. **Be Mentally Aware**

So, what is the proper preparation? You’re physically alert. You’re morally pure. You are, thirdly, mentally aware, and this is very important. You know, the Bible tells us often to *“gird up the loins of [our minds]”* (1 Peter 1:13). Now, what does that mean? Well, in Bible times, the men wore long flowing robes. And, if you go to Israel today, you’ll still see the Bedouins and others wearing these long robes. Now, when a man was going to work to plow, or to fight, he would take those robes, and he would take the loose ends and gird them up and tie a rope around there. And, that would be called “girding up his loins”—just taking those long loose ends, and bringing them all together, and tying them up tight so he wouldn’t trip over them.

Now, your mind is like that: you’ve got a lot of loose ends. And, in order to have a quiet time, you have to get mentally tough. It’s hard for me. I have a peculiar type of mind. My mind wants to run off on all kinds of ideas all the time, and I have to gird up the loins of my mind, and bring it. You see, when you—when you—come to a quiet time, you’ve got to be serious. Come with anticipation. Come eagerly. Come expecting to receive something. And, don’t just wait ’till you get all warm around the heart and wet around the lashes and just think, “I’ve got to feel real mellow.” Be tough-minded. Say, “I’m coming, Lord.” And, emotion doesn’t really have all that much to do with it. It’s good

to feel juicy when you pray, but you don't have to. And, I hear people say, "Well, you know, my prayers didn't get above the light bulb." Well, that's probably your problem, because God is underneath the light bulbs as well. I mean, He's here; He's present. And, your emotions don't bring Him near; He is near by the blood of Jesus Christ. And, what you need to do is to be physically alert, morally pure, and mentally aware.

III. You Must Have the Proper Place

Now, we've said you have the proper period; you have the proper preparation. Now, here's the third thing, if you would have a good quiet time—a meaningful quiet time: there must be the proper place. Now, what is the proper place? Jesus said, "When you pray, enter into your closet and pray" (Matthew 6:6). Now, He did not mean the clothes closet—I'm serious about that. Some people... The only thing we know about a closet is a clothes closet.

I went to school with a boy, a preacher boy, at Stetson University. He took this so literally. His name—Jud. Jud, in the dormitory, went into the clothes closet—shut the door—to pray. And, after a while—I mean, late in the day, or late in the night—we said, "Where's Jud? Any body seen Jud? Has something happened to Jud?" Finally, when, finally, when we opened the closet door, he was in there sound asleep on his knees in that closet. He had gone in there, shut the door, and gotten quiet—no air in there. It's a wonder he didn't suffocate in there. He had just taken this so literally. He went into a little closet and shut the door.

What did our Lord mean when He said, "Enter into your closet and pray" (Matthew 6:6)? The word *closet* simply means into "a place of isolation," somewhere where you can shut the door on the world and open the windows to Heaven. As you study the life of Jesus, you find out that Jesus was not always in a literal closet, but you will find out that Jesus would seek to be alone. Sometimes He'd go out into a mountain. Sometimes He went into the wilderness. Sometimes He went into a garden. You see, it is the secret place that is the sacred place. Now, when I say, "the secret place," I don't mean a place that no one else knows about; I simply mean a place where you are there alone with the Lord. My suggestion is that it be well-lit and well-ventilated. What is... Why is the Lord saying, "Enter into your closet and pray" (Matthew 6:6)?

A. To Keep Us from Being Hypocrites

Well, number one: We are to... What you are when you're alone is what you are. I mean it: the mark of your prayer life is not really how well you pray in public, but in private. Your Father who sees you in secret will reward you openly. Now, that's one reason just—to keep us from being hypocrites.

B. To Avoid Distraction

But, another reason that you go to the secret place is to avoid distraction—visual distractions and noises, audible distractions and people who come in.

And so, have the proper period. *“In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up”* (Psalm 5:3). Have the proper preparation physically, morally, mentally. Be prepared. Find a proper place. Get some place that is the place that you’re accustomed to going. My place... I’m blessed in that I have my study at my house, and I love that; it’s a blessing to me. Most people don’t have that, but I have that. I do my work there. I, when I’m there, I can go into my study. My books are there; my desk is there. I have my materials out there, and that’s a blessing to me. And, granted, many people don’t have a place like that. My wife has a place where she gets up and goes around. There’s a hallway that connects our garage to our living room, and we have some books out there; and there’s a little nook out there. That’s the place that she retires to, to be alone with God, and it’s her special place. But, find a place. Pray and ask God to give you a place. It just may be your bedroom. It may be, if you got a lot of children in the house, you may have to go the bathroom and lock the door—whatever. But, find a special place to get alone with God.

IV. You Must Have the Proper Provisions

Now, here’s the fourth thing: not only should there be a proper place, but you need to have the proper provisions; you need to have the right tools.

A. A Readable Bible

And, these are going to include, first of all, a readable Bible. Now, don’t get a small print Bible. Invest in a Bible. If your birthday’s coming up, go in the bookstore and let Curtis show you a good Bible with good print, and wide margins, and good paper—something that you can write in and make notes in. And, don’t be afraid to write in your Bible and make notes in your Bible. Wear it out, and get another one! And, but don’t throw the old one away. Save it, and keep it, and look back on it some time...be like an old friend to you. I have Bibles that are decades old. Sometimes I go back and find things that...notes I made there, and memories will spring back up of things that God taught—things that maybe I had long since forgotten. But, get a good, readable Bible. As a matter of fact, you need two or three Bibles—maybe a Study Bible and then a Bible to bring to church. But, that’s the best investment. Somebody said, “The person that has a Bible falling apart probably has a life that’s not.” I mean, when you read it, and underlined it, and wept over it, and written in it, that’s fine; that’s not irreverent to do that, but still treat the Bible with reverence.

B. A Devotional Journal

Now, not only should you have a readable Bible, but get also a loose-leaf devotional journal. I have a journal, and I don't write in the journal every morning, but I will write something when I study. If I don't put it in the journal, if I don't think it's worthy of the journal, I'll write it on a piece of paper and maybe discard it—maybe on a yellow legal pad. But, get a journal.

To me it would almost be unthinkable to think that I would read with a pen in my hand—almost unthinkable! I mean, I, instinctively, when I reach for the Bible, reach for a pen. Why? Expect God to give you something. You say, “Well, that’s all right, Pastor. I’ve got a good memory. I’ll remember it.” Who are you kidding? I have a fair memory, but I want to tell you, folks, that it is better to write it down. It impresses it in your mind. And, *the weakest ink is better than the best memory*. Write it down in your journal. Expect God to give you something.

C. A Prayer Journal

Not only should you have a journal where you keep thoughts, but you need a companion, which is a prayer journal. I've kept a prayer journal for many years, and I don't use it every morning, but I use it many mornings. I'd get down to remind myself of things that I'm praying about for myself, and for my family, and for my loved ones, and for you and for this church.

D. A Notepad for Daily Tasks

And then, another thing that you need—and this doesn't need to be a piece that you keep all the time—but just keep a little notepad there to write down things that you need to do during the day, just your daily assignment. And, those things will come to your mind as you pray or come to your mind before you pray, so you can pray for them. So, if you have your devotional journal, you have your...where God is giving you thoughts from His Word. You have your prayer journal of people that you're going to pray for. And, by the way, when you have a prayer journal, that will help you spread out your prayers and to pray systematically for things and people that you might not pray for ordinarily.

E. A Notepad of God's Daily Tasks for You

And then, also, have that notepad of things that God wants you to do during the day. What you're doing when you come to the prayer time is reporting for duty, and asking God to show you what He wants you to do that particular day, and also pleading for power to do what He wants you to do.

So, there are the proper provisions: the Bible, the devotional journal, the prayer journal, and a note—reminder of things to do. That's a very simple thing, but at least

those things. There are many other tools if you are into serious Bible study. Of course, you want a Bible dictionary; you want a concordance and all that. But, I'm not talking about that for this. This is your quiet time. You're not even here preparing your Sunday School lesson. You're not here preparing a sermon, per se; you're just here to meet with the Lord.

V. You Must Have a Proper Procedure

Now, number five: a proper procedure. What is the proper procedure? Now, you're walking into the place. It's your best time—physically alert, you're morally pure, you're mentally aware. You've come. You've shut out distractions. You're in there with God. You're ready. All right. Now, what do you do? What procedure do you take?

A. Get Quiet

May I recommend that the very first thing you do is just to get still and to get quiet? You know the Bible says, *"Be still, and know that I am [the Lord]"* (Psalm 46:10). Just fix and focus your mind on Him. Calm down. Relax. Recognize His presence. *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10). If you'll think about what's happening, you are having a private interview with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you need to think about that. Let your mind dwell on the fact that Jesus is there with you.

Night before last, I had a very wonderful privilege. I taught a couple of days in North Carolina at The Cove, which is The Billy Graham Learning Center. On Thursday night, Dr. and Mrs. Graham came over and said to Joyce and myself that they would like to have dinner with us. And so, we sat down in a little upper room with Dr. Billy Graham and Mrs. Graham and Joyce and myself, and had a wonderful dinner—and just to talk about the things of God and the blessing that was. And, what a humbling experience and a great experience it was for us! But friend, we all have a bigger, better honor than that every morning, and that's to meet with Jesus—I mean, to be alone with the Lord Jesus Christ. *"[To] sup with him, and he with me"* (Revelation 3:20)—that's what He has invited us to do. And, we need to fix our minds and focus our minds on the gift of privilege, for the Lord Jesus said, *"Lo, I am with you always, even [to] the end of the world"* (Matthew 28:20). So, number one: Just get quiet. Take a deep breath. Focus your thoughts on the Lord.

I have begun to do something recently, and it's been a blessing to me. Now, you don't have to do this, but I want to tell you something: it's one of the sweetest things to me personally that I have learned to do. I want you to try it some time. Get alone with the Lord; when you're getting ready to have that time with Him, look up and lift your hands to Him. When you lift your hands, first of all, lift your hands in praise, and say, "Lord, I praise You—just praise You." Then, lift your hands again and say, "Lord, I

surrender.” You know, when you lift your hands, you surrender. Just say, “Lord, I surrender. I’m Yours! I am under Your control.” And then, lift your hands a third time and say, “Lord, I receive,” as you’re expecting to receive something. Just try it. Just try those three things. Just get alone, and just, before God, just lift your hands and say, “Lord, I praise You. Lord, I surrender. Lord, I receive.” Now, that, just—that, just—will tune your heart to think about the presence of God.

Now, I think those kinds of things are a lot better done in private than in public, and if I feel even a little embarrassed...talking about those kind of things alone in private with the Lord. It’s such a blessing to me to do that—to know that I just...something about saying, “Lord, I lift my hands in praise. Lord, I lift my hands in surrender. Lord, I lift my hands in expectation.” You just do this even before you begin to pray. And so, you get still and know He’s there.

B. Get into the Word of God

Now, next, get into the Word of God. It’s better to start reading the Bible than it is in prayer—than to start in prayer. Don’t pray first; this is my advice. Don’t pray first and then read the Word. Read the Word first and then pray. It is more important for you to hear from God even than for God to hear from you, because God already knows all about you, but you need to know a lot more about Him. So, you start, first of all, reading the Word of God. That will tune your heart and get your heart ready to pray. You hear God, and then talk to God in prayer. A quiet time is a time alone with God, where you hear from God and God hears from you.

1. Read for Quality and Not Quantity

Now, when you read the Bible, read for quality and not quantity. Don’t see how much of the Bible you can read. Now, a lot of people have a goal to read the Bible through in a year—read the Bible through in six months. That’s wonderful! Do that! But, that’s not your quiet time. I mean, if you’re not careful, you’ll be pushing ahead when you ought not to be pushing ahead. Sometimes you might spend a morning on one verse. Stop and think as you’re reading the Word of God, “What is God telling me?” Not, “What does this say?” Of course it says something. Of course—it’s the Word of God. But, “What is God saying to me—to me?” Not, “What does God want me to tell somebody?” Not, “What am I going to teach in Sunday School?” “What is God saying to me?” So, read it very thoughtfully.

2. Read It Sequentially

Now, of course, read the Bible like you would read any other book in one sense of the word. You don’t just pick up a book, and just open it up at random, and start reading in the middle of a paragraph, and then say, “Well, this book doesn’t make sense to me.” That’s the way a lot of people read the Bible—just kind of a lucky dibs. I mean, there it

is! No, read it sequentially, and read it in paragraphs or units. I mean, use some common sense when you read the Bible.

3. Keep Your Bible Reading Balanced

And, keep your Bible reading balanced. Read from the Old Testament, and read from the New Testament. Read regularly from the Psalms, because when you read the Psalms, you learn to worship, and you'll get encouragement. Read regularly from the Book of Proverbs, because from the Book of Proverbs you'll get wisdom. And then, read balanced, reading in the rest of the Bible.

Now, what about having devotional books? Well, devotional books are wonderful, but even now, this is not the place for devotional books. Read devotional books. Joyce and I read almost every morning from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*. Wonderful, but that is still not the place for this. This is the place where you just open the Bible, and read intelligently, sequentially, with an open mind, a readable Bible to let God speak to you. All right. So, get quiet. Focus your mind on the Lord. Begin to read the Word of God.

C. Meditate on the Word of God

And then, meditate on it—meditate on it! Think about it. And, I don't mean Oriental meditation; I don't mean mystical meditation. The difference between Oriental, mystical Buddhism and all that kind of meditation is that those people assume that the answer is within them, but the answer is not. You focus on the Word of God, and you meditate on the Word of God and let the Word of God permeate you. Just think about it; meditate on it.

Now, I've given you, many times, these questions to ask as you meditate on the Word of God. And, if you're a teacher or a preacher or any body else, and you're trying to get up a sermon, or you just simply...or a lesson, or you want a blessing out of the Word of God, you can ask these questions with a clean heart, and the Bible will burst aflame. Here they are. Jot them down. Joyce says, "When you give lists, you always give them too fast," so we will slow down. Number one: Is there a command to obey? Number two: Is there a promise to claim? Number three: Is there a sin to avoid? Four: Is there a lesson to learn? Five: Is there a new truth to carry with me?

Now, just simply take those questions. There may be others. I used to have those questions recorded in the flyleaf of a Bible, and I would refer to them often. It's amazing. Let me give them to you again in case you did not get them all. *Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? A sin to avoid? A lesson to learn? A new truth to carry with me?*

D. Record What God Has Given You

So, prepare your heart. Get into the Word of God. Meditate on the Word of God, and

then record what God has given you. This is where the prayer journal comes in. Write it down. It doesn't have to be flowery. You're not writing it for publication. You're not writing it to impress other people. Make it intensely personal, but once you do this you'll find yourself sharing it with other people. I mean, you will, when you do this and you leave it, you will be wanting to share the nuggets that God has given you, and that will make you a blessing to be around. You'll have a wealth of material for lessons and devotions, though that's not even your purpose in doing it.

At the same time, take that notepad, and write down the things that you need to do—action points. This is the one that may be just for the day—obligations, and goals, and decisions that come out of that time.

E. Pray It in

Now, you're ready to pray. Pray it in, and when you pray, pour out your soul. Be natural. Don't try to use flowery language when you pray. Jesus said, "Don't use vain repetition. You're not heard for your much speaking." (Matthew 6:7) Be honest with God. Tell Him how you feel. He already knows. Tell Him. Be honest.

This is a time... From time to time you refer to your prayer journal—continuing burdens and prayer, people that you're praying for, answers to prayer. Pray out loud. Pray—pray audibly. If you just try to pray silently—and you have to pray silently sometimes if you're in a crowd—but when you're alone, pray audibly. Why? It keeps your mind on track. It enables you to stay focused.

Try to make complete sentences. Try to use good English when you pray. I'm not talking about King James English. I'm just simply saying that you're speaking to God. Speak clearly; speak plainly. Think about what you are saying when you pray. And, don't rush your prayer, but don't draw it out. I mean, when you finished—when you finish, quit—pray as long as you have a concern on your heart. Don't just keep repeating things like you're going to impress God with the number of words that you say.

What about when you pray and your mind wanders? Do you ever try to pray and your mind wanders? Lift your hands. Sure—sure! Why? Well, two reasons: number one, it may be an attack of the devil, and if you sense it's an attack of the devil, rebuke the devil; but number two, it may be that something is coming to your heart. You're praying over here, but your real need, and your real desire, and your subconscious is saying, "This is what I'm concerned about—my meeting this afternoon." And, your mind goes to that. How do you deal with that? Just leave this thing, and go over there, and pray about that thing—that thing that's caused your mind to wander. Well then, pray about it. Tell God about it. Talk to God about it, and then you're done with it. But, until you deal with it, it'll just keep coming back again. So, have that time where you tell God the concern of

your heart, and then go back to your other praying.

F. Exhort One Another

Now, after you've done this, begin to share out of your quiet time with one another. We ought to meet people and exhort one another. You see, God did not make us to be reservoirs; God made us to be conduits.

G. Obey What God Tells You

All right. Now, what have we said: number one, get still, and know He's God; number two, get into the Word of God; number three, meditate on the Word of God, and ask those questions; number four, write down what we've learned; then, number five, pray it in. Be natural, pray our hearts out to God. Number six, share what we've learned and now listen. Obey what God tells you. That's the seventh thing. We're talking now about this proper procedure. Obey. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way" (John H. Sammis). Now, your spiritual train is going to run on two rails: one is revelation, and the other is obedience—revelation and obedience. And, if either rail stops, your train stops. Learn to obey the Word of God, and when you fail, confess it.

Conclusion

Now, you say, "Pastor, if I begin to do this, how soon will it be before I see a change in my life?" Well, I don't know. You'll see some change, I believe, right away. But, don't expect anything radical and dramatic.

Do you know what my wife gives me every morning? You won't believe it, but brewer's yeast. Did you ever taste brewer's yeast? Have you tasted brewer's yeast, Bob? I'm gonna give you some brewer's yeast—two big tablespoons full of it. And then, on top of that, bee pollen. Did you ever take bee pollen? Bee pollen—about a half a teaspoon full of bee pollen. And then, a fist full of vitamins and then 2% milk. And, certain brands of food that have...that's good. You know what? I've learned to like it. But, I'll tell you something: when you begin to eat that or to ingest that, you're not going to feel 100% better in 15 minutes. But, if you'll get on a regiment of eating right, it'll change you—it'll change you. And, if you'll get on a regiment of obeying the Word of God, getting into the Word of God, and feeding your soul, the change will not be spasmodic, and it may not be dramatic. But, on the long run, it will change you for eternity. We need to have a quality quiet time. And again, I don't stand before you as the paragon of excellence. And, I'm well aware when I put that finger out, there are three pointing right at me. But, these are some things that I've learned, and may you learn them, too.

Father, seal the message to our hearts, and help us to learn, dear Lord, how to have a quality quiet time. In Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

The Soul Winner's Heart

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 4, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 126

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

PSALMS 126:6

Outline

Introduction

- A. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Worth of a Soul
 - 1. Desirability
 - 2. Durability
 - 3. Possibility
 - B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of Christ
 - C. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Reward of the Soul Winner
 - I. The Soul Winner's Program
 - II. The Soul Winner's Passion
 - III. The Soul Winner's Power
 - IV. The Soul Winner's Promise
- Conclusion

Introduction

Take your Bible, if you would, please, and turn to Psalm 126. And, I want to talk to you tonight about “The Soul Winner's Heart.” We're coming to an evangelistic crusade. We have done the best planning that we know how. We're calling for our church to pray like never before. We are trying to tell the community. We're doing all that we know to do. But, the one key ingredient is sitting before me, and that is the congregation. And, my heart is so heavy tonight, that your heart might be burdened for the unsaved.

I want us to think tonight about the soul winner's heart. Psalm 126, verse 1: *“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue was singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south”—and now, here's the promise—“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:1–6). Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6

(Psalm 126:5–6) tell me of the soul winner’s heart.

Now, may I ask you a question? Do you consider yourself to be a wise person? Do you? Now, I’m not asking, “Are you smart?” I’m not asking, “Are you talented?” I’m not asking, “Are you sharp?” But, do you consider yourself to be wise? Now, if you consider yourself to be wise, you’re going to have a soul winner’s heart—at least, if you are truly wise. Proverbs 11 and verse 30 says, *“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life”—your life is to be like a tree that brings forth life—“and he that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30). Now, I want you to listen to that very carefully: *“he that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30). May I put that in reverse and say if you’re not a soul winner, if you’re not a personal soul winner, you are not wise, if you’re not endeavoring to bring people to Jesus Christ?

A. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Worth of a Soul**

Now, why is the matter of bringing people to Jesus Christ such a wise thing, according to Jesus? Jesus said that one soul is worth more than all of the world—Mark 8, verse 36 (Mark 8:36). Jesus asked this pregnant question: *“What [should] it profit a man, if he [should] gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what [should] a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Mark 8:36–37). Now, what Jesus is saying is that a soul is of infinite worth. What makes anything of worth?

1. Desirability

Well, number one: Desirability—what a person will pay for a thing tells something of its worth. Any appraiser knows that. Well, what did Jesus pay for a soul? First Peter 1, verses 18 and 19: *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your [elders]; But with the precious blood of Christ, as...a lamb without [spot] and without [blemish]”* (1 Peter 1:18–19). A soul is precious—one soul that Jesus would have died for, one soul alone. Jesus baptized His soul in Hell and walked the burning corridors of the damned, that we might see life in Him.

2. Durability

Also, an object is measured not only by desirability, but by durability. A soul never ceases to exist. There was a time when you were not; there will never be a time when you will not be. A soul goes on—endless, timeless, dateless, measureless. You will exist forever. Jesus teaches that you will exist either in Heaven or in Hell. Jesus had more to say about Hell than any other preacher in the Bible. And, Hell is a place of endless duration; Heaven is a place of endless duration. What makes a thing valuable? Well, it is desirability, durability.

3. Possibility

Another thing that makes anything valuable is possibility—not only what it is, but what it

may become. Your soul is valuable not only because of what it is right now, but what potentiality God has built into it. First John 3, verse 2: *“Beloved...it doth not yet appear what we shall be [like]: but we know that, when he shall appear, we [will] be like him”* (1 John 3:2). Your soul will be transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, with every vestige of sin removed and the image of Jesus Christ stamped indelibly upon you. Sitting in that seat tonight where you are there are three persons: there’s the person you are now; the person you could be for evil, if you take your eyes from Jesus; and the person you will be one of these days, when you are transformed into the likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of Christ

You see, why is it so wise to win souls? Souls are so valuable that Jesus bathed this world in blood. And, you see, He has commanded us to win souls. If you fail to win souls, you’re not merely missing a blessing; if you don’t have a soul winner’s heart—may I say this to you very clearly and plainly?—you’re not right with God. Listen to me, those of you on the back row: if you’re not trying to win souls to Jesus, you’re not right with God.

You say, “Well, I’m here on Sunday night.” God is not impressed. Well, you say, “I give money.” God is not impressed. You say, “I sing.” God is not impressed. I don’t care how faithfully you attend, I don’t care how eloquently you preach, I care not how beautifully you sing, I care not how circumspectly you walk, I care not how studiously you delve into the Word of God—I’m going to tell you big, plain, and straight, if you don’t have a soul winner’s heart, you are not right with God—you’re not right with God. Andrew Murray said, “There are two classes of Christians—souls winners and backsliders.” And, you’re one or the other. Some of you have never won a soul to Christ. Well, it’s disobedience to Christ. He gave us the Great Commission in Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20 (Matthew 28:18–20). To fail is not merely to miss a blessing; it is high treason against your King.

And, I’ll tell you something else: if you’re not...if you don’t have a soul winner’s heart, you don’t love Jesus. “Oh,” you say, “I love Jesus. I’m not a soul winner.” No, you don’t love Jesus. How can you love Jesus and not be concerned about what Jesus is concerned about? Jesus said in John 14:15: *“If [you] love me, keep my commandments.”* Didn’t He say that? So, how can you say you love Him if you don’t have a soul winner’s heart?

You say, “Well, I’m a follower of Jesus.” If you’re not a soul winner, you’re not a follower of Jesus. You have no right to call yourself a follower of Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 4, verse 19: *“Follow me, and I will make you [to become] fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:19). If you’re not fishing, you’re not following. I don’t know what you may be

doing, but I'm telling one thing: if you do not have a soul winner's heart, you are not a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You say, "Well, at least I love Him. I am abiding in Christ." No, you're not. If you don't have a soul winner's heart, you're not abiding in Christ. John 15, verse 4: Jesus said, "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me*" (John 15:4).

C. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Reward of the Soul Winner**

What I'm saying is this—that it is wise to win souls because of the value of a soul. I'm saying it is wise to win souls because of the command of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am saying it is wise to win souls because of the reward of the soul winner. Did you know in a few short years our destiny is going to be settled? I mean, we're not going to be here upon this veil of tears in a few short years. It may be a few days for many of us. But, I'm going to tell you one thing: all of the soul winning you will ever do, if I understand the Bible, you'll do in this life. Now, eternity is long. There are many things we're going to do in eternity, but I don't find anywhere in the Bible where we are going to win souls. But, you see, any reward you have for soul winning you're going to gather now. Daniel 12 and verse 3: "*And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that win many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever*"—"those [who are] wise...and...turn many to righteousness" (Daniel 12:3).

Many of us, when we were younger, were interested in athletics—and I was. I'm a has-been. I notice the further you get away from the athletic endeavors the better you were as you talk about it. But, I remember some awards that I received. Everybody wanted a letterman's sweater, so I had the letterman's sweater. Everybody wanted the championship football; and so, I was given the football. Everybody wanted the little gold football because we had the championship. I had—with my teammates—had the gold football. Everybody wanted the awards. I was given a loving cup. I don't have any of those things. The moths got the sweater. A thief broke in our house and got the gold football. Who has the loving cup, I haven't got any idea. I made a mistake of letting some boys play with the game ball; it's gone. That's all gone. I'll tell you one thing, friend: if you win a soul to Jesus Christ, that's marked up for all eternity. That's what the Bible says: "you will shine as the brightness of the stars forever and ever and ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). When I get to Heaven, I want to have a host of people with me. I'd like somebody to take me by the hand, and bring me to the throne, and say, "Jesus, this is Adrian. He told me about You." Wouldn't you like that?

Must I go, and empty handed?

Must I meet my Savior so?

[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,

Must I empty handed go?

—CHARLES C. LUTHER

Some of you have been members of this church for 10, 15, 20, 30, 40 years and have never won one soul to Jesus Christ. There's something desperately wrong. You're not following Jesus. You're not abiding in Jesus. You're not loving Jesus. You are not obeying Jesus Christ. And folks, it's time that we had a radical change.

Did you know, in this coming crusade—now, this is a Sunday night crowd, so let's just talk to this Sunday night crowd. Thank God you're here—but in this—well, there's several thousand here; a couple of thousand, perhaps—in this crusade, we ought to have at least 2,000 professions of faith. Each one of us ought to go and get at least one—at least one.

There, in the Civil War, they were fighting the Union Army and the Confederate Army. Old Jim was a Confederate soldier. He had a squirrel rifle. He got out there fighting, and his buddies retreated and left Jim out there. And, they thought, "Well, Jim's been killed." And, after a while, Jim came back. He had about four or five Union soldiers. He was herding them out of the woods. They said, "Jim, where'd you get 'em? Where'd you get 'em?" He said, "The woods are full of them. Go get one for yourself." Now folks, I want to tell you something: there are people are out there. If you don't think that people can be saved, it's just because you're not witnessing.

I'll tell you, people are hungry to know the Lord Jesus Christ more than ever before. And, between now and January 1st, we're going to have the greatest window to bring souls to Jesus Christ we have ever known. I'm not saying that Jesus is coming January 1st. I'm not saying He's not, either. But, I'm saying that people are thinking about the end times. People are concerned about their souls. People have seen everything else. This is a glorious opportunity to win souls to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let's look at our text again here in Psalm 126, and notice what he says (we're talking about the soul winner's heart): *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:5–6).

I. The Soul Winner's Program

First of all, let's talk about the desire to go—the soul winner's program. You must go! You must be intentional about this thing. Nothing takes the place of being intentional about winning souls. "Well," you say, "well, I just want people to see my life, Pastor. I just want them to see my life. And, I hope that when they see my life, that'll bring them to Jesus." You're full of arrogant pride. They're not saved by your life; they're saved by His death. And, until they learn of His death, 'till they learn of His resurrection, they are not going to be saved. And, you're not going to be a soul winner until you go.

Mark 16, verse 15: *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). That literally says, “As you go”—“as you go.” Now, what does that mean? That doesn’t mean that you come down to the church on Tuesday night, and get some cards, and go out visiting—that’s fine, but that’s not what he’s talking about. When you go to work tomorrow, have the soul winner’s heart. When you go shopping tomorrow, have the soul winner’s heart. When you go to lunch tomorrow, have the soul winner’s heart. When you go to school tomorrow, as you go, make disciples. People are all around us who need the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. We think we’ve done God a wild favor when we come and sing the hallelujah chorus—and that was wonderful. *There are many churches that are sacred societies for snubbing sinners.* We have the idea that God wants us just to come, and worship, and get in our holy huddles.

Well, you say, “Well, Pastor, you told us to be separate. You told us that we’re to separate ourselves from the world. And, after all, these people are sinners. Pastor, you know, you...you just...you just know how they live” Well, I think I do know. I’m not deaf, blind, and dumb. Of course, they live that way—they’re sinners. What do you expect sinners to do except to sin? They are sinners. Yes, we’re to live a separate life, but separation is not isolation. You don’t put the fish in one barrel and the salt in another. They crucified Jesus for being a friend to sinners. What we call our program for evangelism here is called “Making Friends Forever.” You need to be a friend to these people. You are to be spiritually distinct, not socially segregated. Go out and mix with these people. Do you know your neighbors? Do you know those round about you? Listen, we need to invite these people to Christ.

If we have this great crusade, and we have these people coming in here to give their testimonies for Jesus Christ, and we’re just simply pouring salt on the salt, what good is that? We’ve got to get the lost here. And, all of the advertising that we do will take no place—putting up a sign in your yard will not take the place, putting a door knocker there, putting an advertisement in the newspaper, putting an announcement on television or radio will not take the place—of your going to a friend and saying, “Would you please be my guest tonight at thus-and-such a...?” We’re going to have the Governor of Arkansas...is going to be there. I want you to hear him. The coach of the great football team there, semi-great—not the University of Florida, but Florida State. It’s got “Florida” in it; that’s halfway good. We’re going to have this man there. Come and hear. Why are we doing that? Well, to be wise as serpents, harmless as doves, trying to find an interest to people. But, all of that is no good unless you go.

Now, listen to Luke 14, verse 23: *“And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and [the] hedges, and compel them to come in”* (Luke 14:23). You say, “Well, we built these beautiful buildings. Here we are. If they want to come, let them come.” I

want to ask you a question: Can you find one verse in the Bible where the unsaved are commanded to come to church? I can't. I can find many verses where the Church is commanded to go to them. We are to go! Don't think it's strange they don't come. The world has been trying to tell us—the world has been trying to say—“Have the best music. Have good preaching. Have comfortable seats. Have the building heated and air-conditioned. Use the best techniques. Have friendly ushers. Advertise on radio, television, and newspaper. And, we're still not coming!” That's what the world is telling us. Have you ever learned that?

Hey, I want to ask you a question: Do you find it hard to get to church on Sunday morning? Well, listen—when...especially with children? Friend, I want to tell you, 'time we got here on Sunday morning, we needed to be here, because half the time we lost our religion getting here. I mean, you have to start on Saturday night to get there on Sunday morning. And folks, we want to come—we want to come! Have you ever thought how easy it is for the unsaved to stay away from church? *“He that goeth forth”* (Psalm 126:6).

A little boy was talking about his friends, and they were having a party. And, he said, “There ain't nobody going.” His mother didn't like his English, and she tried to correct him. She said, “I am not going. You are not going. We are not going. They are not going. Do you understand that?” He said, “Yeah, it looks like ain't nobody going.” And, that's the way I think.

What would happen—what would happen—this morning, we had more than 10,000 people here—what would happen if every one of them were soul winners? Dear God, what would happen? And, is there any reason they shouldn't be? Is there any reason that somebody who knows the Lord Jesus Christ, who has been twice-born; somebody who knows that Jesus hung in agony and blood on the cross for them; somebody that knows there is a fiery, burning Hell; and somebody that knows there's a glorious Heaven—is there any reason they ought not to be concerned and bring souls to Christ? I'll tell you what's going to happen: some of you who are here tonight, when we have this evangelistic crusade, you're going to sit back, crack back, and watch television rather than coming. I tell you what you ought to do: you ought to examine your heart. You ought to see, do you really care? Does it make any difference to you?

What is the soul winner's program? *“He that goeth forth”* (Psalm 126:6).

II. The Soul Winner's Passion

And, what is the soul winner's passion? *“He that goeth forth and weepeth”* (Psalm 126:6). Somebody described the modern Church as “a dry-eyed Church in a Hell-bent world.” The missing ingredient in many of our churches, much of our praying, much of our singing, and much of our preaching is a lack of tears. Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

Shouldn't we weep over Memphis? Paul wept over the unsaved. Acts 20, verse 31: *"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"* (Acts 20:31). Jeremiah wept over a decadent nation. Jeremiah 9 and verse 1: he says, *"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"* (Jeremiah 9:1). Tears touch the heart of God. King Hezekiah cried to God, and God said to Hezekiah, "I have seen thy tears; I have heard thy prayer"—"I have seen thy tears" (2 Kings 20:5; Isaiah 38:5). If you don't have a broken heart for the unsaved, I suggest that you get on your knees in prayer before God, confess the coldness of your heart, and ask God to give you a broken heart to be moved with compassion.

Are you a follower of Jesus? Listen to this scripture—Matthew 9, verse 36 (speaking of Jesus): *"[And] when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36). Most of the people, even in our city—the buckle on the Bible belt—have not got a clue. They have not got a clue as to how to be saved. *Tears are a tangible token of our concern.*

III. The Soul Winner's Power

But, not only our purpose and our passion—I want you to notice our power. What is the source of our power? Look at it: *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed"* (Psalm 126:6). The power is in the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12: *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful...sharper than [a] twoedged sword."* *"The seed is the word"* (Luke 8:11). We are to go scattering the seed. There are all kinds of ways to scatter the seed: you can do it through sermon tapes, you can do it through books, you can do it through tracts—all kinds of tools that we've giving you to sow the seed through this world.

What do you do with the Bible? You're to know it in your head. You're to store it in your heart. You're to sow it in the world. Listen, it is not the truth that we know—it is the truth that we sow—that's going to change this world. You're not going to have a harvest unless you put the seed in the ground. We are to sow precious seed. The Bible says in Galatians 6, verse 7: *"God is not mocked...[whatever] a man [sows], that shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7). If you want people to believe, you've got to give them something to believe. You say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, I am not skilled in that. I don't know how." Then learn how!

The first soul I ever won I won with John 3:16. I didn't know any other scripture. If I did, I just did. I knew John 3:16. As a boy, a bare-chested boy, with just a pair of trousers, barefooted on the corner of 40th Street and Broadway in West Palm Beach, I found an old man, an old bewhiskered man—led him to Jesus Christ with John 3:16.

And, that's plenty. I just explained to him when God loved, He loved the world. When God gave, He gave His soul, His Son, and that when I believed on Him, Jesus saved me, and if he would believe on Him, Jesus would save him. Prayed with him—he gave his heart to Jesus Christ (to my knowledge, the first soul that I ever won to Christ, with one verse of Scripture). I didn't know any four spiritual laws. I didn't know the E.E. program. I didn't know the Roman road. I didn't know anything about follow-up. But, I'm telling you, friend, if you have a heart for souls, you will find a way—you will find a way. You will make a way. You may stumble.

IV. The Soul Winner's Promise

Now, what is the promise? We've talked about the power. What is the promise?

“He...shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6). Does that mean that everybody you witness to is going to be saved? No. Most of the people I witness to don't get saved, so far as I know, and that's biblical. Jesus, in Mark 4, told about a sower who went forth to sow. And, some of the seed fell on hardened soil, and it didn't bring forth a crop. Some fell on shallow soil with a sub-layer of rock; it didn't bring forth a crop. Some fell on wheat-infested soil; it didn't bring forth a crop. But, some fell on good soil, and it brought forth a crop (Mark 4:3–8). Now, our job, dear friend, is not to analyze the soil; our job is to sow the seed. You don't know who's who. You don't know what's what. You don't know what's going to happen.

I went out soul winning one night. There was a fellow—he was about that tall—I was witnessing to. And, he was a crop duster, kind of a strange guy. He was so big. He got in that little airplane. He literally had to put both feet out the doors of that airplane in order to fly it, and then, somehow, bring and put his knees on his chin to work the pedals when he needed to. And, I went to witness to him, and I sat in his home. His father came in there. I've never seen a man that I thought was more the mirror, the epitome, of evil than that man. As I was sitting there witnessing, I watched that man. He sat there, and he just glared at me. And, the boy had told me—the man, the crop duster—said, “My dad is a mean man. My dad doesn't believe in what you're doing,” and so forth. I just had to screw up my courage and say, “Lord, don't let me be intimidated by that man.” I went ahead and witnessed to Jim, and witnessed to Jim, and witnessed to Jim. He gave his heart to Christ and got saved. I left that house kind of feeling good to get out with my hide.

Years and years later, in a service, we were having testimonies, and that man stood up and gave a testimony, and here's what he said. He gave a glowing testimony of his faith in Christ and how Christ had changed his life. And then, he pointed at me like that, and he said, “It was through the witness of that man that I came to know Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.” Now friend, I want to tell you, had I been a soil examiner rather

than a seed sower, I would not have done anything. And, you see, I don't know what the soil is like. You don't know what the soil is like. And, the seed—there's plenty of it; just sow it everywhere—just sow it everywhere, everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. *“He that [goest] forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing”* (Psalm 126:6).

You get at it, and I'll promise you—there are no *ifs*, *ands*, and *buts* about it—you're going to win somebody. If you can't win one of your family members, win somebody else's family. If you can't win an adult, win a child. If you can't win a child, win an adult. If you can't win your neighbor, win somebody else's neighbor. But, if you will go at it with a broken heart, praying in the name of Jesus in obedience, the Bible says, no doubt about it, you're going to come with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you (Psalm 126:6). And, what a day that is going to be when we bring the harvest and lay the golden grain at Jesus's feet! And, you know, it says we're going to *“come again with rejoicing”* (Psalm 126:6). There's no greater joy than to bring a soul to Christ.

I had a preacher come in here the other day, or somebody. He said, “How do you stand up there and preach in front of all those people? How do you do that?” I don't know—just do it. You just do it. It's no harder to preach to 1,000 than it is to 50. You say the same thing the same way. It doesn't matter how many are there, how few are there. And, I get a blessing when I preach and draw the net and we see people come to Christ. And, I want to tell you something: there is no greater joy than handpicked fruit, just winning them one at a time. Did you know that? On an airplane, going door-to-door, house-to-house—to me that's a greater joy than standing up here and preaching. That handpicked fruit, winning them one by one—there's such a joy. You know, I get more joy out of leading a soul to Christ than I did when I got saved because I know more of what's happening to them than I knew what was happening to me when I gave my heart to Jesus. *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless”*—doubtless, doubtless, doubtless—*“come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:6).

Conclusion

This is the pastor's heart. Listen to me, I beg you. Would you pray, “O Lord Jesus, lay some soul upon my heart and win that soul through me”? Now, maybe you can't close them out right away; maybe you cannot get their name on the dotted line. But, I'll tell you one thing you can do: you can begin to soak them in prayer, to witness to them, love them, and get them to these “Celebrate Jesus Crusades.” I'm praying that we are going to see a harvest of souls like our church has never known. We are making plans. We are working. We are praying. We are advertising. We are—we are—coordinating. We're doing all of that, but the key—the key—is out there.

I want heads bowed and eyes closed—heads bowed and eyes closed. I want you to remember that all of the soul winning and all of the witness you're ever going to do you're going to do this side of Heaven. It's a matter of going and weeping, sowing and reaping. Would you just have a little prayer time with the Lord and talk to Him about your heart?

And folks, I want to confess to you tonight—and it's hard for me to say this, but I want to say it in all honesty: I need a renewal of soul winning passion. Pray for me. And, I want, before you, to dedicate and re-consecrate my life to the matter of being a personal soul winner. Sometimes I get so busy being the pastor of this church, and studying for sermons, and doing all of these things that I lose that passion for souls. So, I'm going to pray about Adrian, and you pray about you. And, let's pray together that God will give us the soul winner's heart.

Faithful in Evangelism

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 29, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 126:5–6

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

PSALMS 126:6

Outline

Introduction

- A. You're Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Value of a Soul
 - 1. Desirability
 - 2. Durability
 - 3. Possibility
 - B. You're Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Command of Christ
 - C. You're Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Reward to the Soul Winner
 - I. The Soul Winner's Program
 - II. The Soul Winner's Passion
 - III. The Soul Winner's Power
 - IV. The Soul Winner's Promise
- Conclusion

Introduction

We've been in a series of Bible studies under the heading “Faithful to God's Family,” and we've been talking to you about some factors of faithfulness. Several Sundays ago, we talked about “Faithful in Bible Study.” And then, we talked about “Faithfulness in Worship.” Then, we talked about “Faithfulness in Fellowship,” and today, “Faithfulness in Evangelism”—soul winning.

Would you take God's Word and find Psalm 126—Psalm 126? We're going to look in verses 5 and 6—Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6. Here's one of the great promises in the Word of God: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). Listen to it again: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). That is the soul winner's promise.

Look up here, and let me ask you a question: Do you consider yourself a wise

person? Now, I didn't ask, "Are you a smart person?" I didn't even ask, "Do you consider yourself a successful person, or a happy person?" Do you consider yourself a wise person? Or, let me put it another way: Does God consider you a wise person? I want to tell you something very frankly: if you are not endeavoring to win souls, you, sir, you, lady, are not wise. The Bible says in Proverbs chapter 11 and verse 30: "*he that winneth souls is wise*"—"he that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Hey, did that get into your heart? May I say it again? "He that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Why is this true?

A. **You're Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Value of a Soul**

First of all, because of the great worth of a soul. It's better to win a soul than to win a Super Bowl. Listen to me: a soul is worth more than a Super Bowl championship. Think about it; think how everybody is so concerned about football. But, the Bible does not say, "If you win the Super Bowl, you're wise." It doesn't say, "If you get wealthy, you're wise." It says, "*He that winneth souls is wise*" (Proverbs 11:30). Jesus, when He spoke of the great worth of a soul, said, "*What [should] it profit a man, if he...gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" (Mark 8:36). And, what was He saying there? That one soul is worth more than all the world—all the stocks, the bonds, the rubies, the diamonds, the banks, the schools, and the sports emporiums put together—one soul!

Why is a soul so valuable? Well, what makes anything valuable?

1. Desirability

First of all, it, is it desirable? Does someone want it? "Well," you say, "how can we tell whether someone wants something?" The price they'll pay for it. Any appraiser will tell you that in making an appraisal of a piece of property, the prime question is, what is someone willing to pay for it? Isn't that true? What is someone willing to pay for it?

What was the Lord Jesus willing to pay for you? First Peter 1, verses 18 and 19: "*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, [such] as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as...a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Peter 1:18–19). Jesus, with His blood, in agony and blood, died upon that cross, because that's how much He valued a soul.

2. Durability

A soul is valuable not only because of desirability, but it's valuable because of durability. What is going to last forever? These buildings are not going to last forever. The clothes you wear are going to disintegrate. Your gold and silver will turn to canker. What will last forever? A soul! When God made the human soul, God made it in His own image. And, your soul could never cease to exist any more than God could cease to exist. Your soul will go on—endless, timeless, dateless, measureless. When the sun, moon, and stars

have grown cold, your soul will still be in existence. There was a time when you were not; there never will be a time when you are not. Your soul will exist forever, either in Heaven or in Hell. You say, “Do you believe in everlasting punishment in Hell?” Indeed, I do. Revelation chapter 20 and verse 10: *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10). The beast and the false prophet are human beings who will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

3. Possibility

You see desirability, durability—I’ll tell you another thing that makes a soul so valuable: it’s possibility—possibility (what your soul can become). Occupying the seat that you’re in this morning are really three persons. You say, “Well, no wonder it’s so crowded.” There are three persons there: there’s the person you are now; there’s the person you could be, and will be, if you give your heart to Jesus Christ ultimately; and there is the person of vileness and wickedness that you will ultimately be if you turn from the Lord Jesus Christ. The person sitting next to you is the most sacred thing you will ever see on this earth apart from the face of Jesus, when He comes. The person sitting next to you is the most sacred thing you will ever see. There’s nothing more sacred than a soul made in the image and the likeness of God. Think that that person next to you has the potential of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ or the horrible potential of spending an eternity in the very pits of Hell.

B. You’re Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Command of Christ

You’re wise to win a soul because of the value of a soul. You’re wise to win a soul because of the command of Christ. You see, soul winning is a command of our Lord. It is not a suggestion; it is a command. Matthew 28, verse 18: *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”*—the word *power* literally means “authority”—*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even [to] the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:18–20).

No one is wise who disobeys his Master. No one is wise who is guilty of high treason against Heaven’s King. I don’t care what else you’re doing, I don’t care how faithfully you attend, I care not how circumspectly you walk, I care not how beautifully you sing, I care not how liberally you give—if you are not endeavoring to bring souls to Jesus Christ, you’re disobedient to Him, and you are not wise. *“He that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30). You’re not following Jesus if you’re not a soul winner, for He said, *“Follow me, and I will make you [to become] fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:19). Did you hear that? *“Follow me, and I will make you [to become] fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:19).

If you're not a fisher of men, do not tell me you're a follower of Jesus. Hello! If you're not a fisher of men, do not tell me that you're a follower of Jesus. Jesus said, *"Follow me, and I will make you [to become] fishers of men"* (Matthew 4:19). It cannot be more clear. What right does a man have to call himself a follower of Jesus Christ who willfully disobeys Jesus Christ?

C. You're Wise to Win a Soul Because of the Reward to the Soul Winner

"He that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30) because of the value of a soul, because of the command of Christ, and because of the reward to the soul winner. There is no greater joy, no greater reward, in this life and in the world to come than to be a soul winner. In the Book of Daniel, chapter 12, and verse 3—put this in your margin: the Bible says, *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever"* (Daniel 12:3).

Many are talking today about football stars, but they will come and go. I played football. I put a lot of expense into football, and I'm not talking about money; I'm talking about blood, sweat, and tears—cups of blood and buckets of sweat on the football field. I got some awards. I played on a championship team, had the privilege of being captain, got a gold football, got a sweater with some letters sewed on it, got a silver cup, got some other things (some certificates and all of those things), got a football (the game ball). I can see it right now; there is it—the game ball. They gave it to me. Let me tell you what happened to all that stuff: somebody broke in the house and got the football. It's gone—the gold football. I loaned the other football to some guys who wanted to play touch, never seen it again. The moths got the sweater, and where the loving cup is I have no idea—no idea. It's gone.

But friend, *"[Those who win souls will] shine as the brightness of the [stars of the] firmament...for ever and ever [and ever]"* (Daniel 12:3). You let Congress make the laws. Let the President try to run the nation. Let the Hollywood stars have the fame, and let those guys play football. But, if you are wise, you're going to win souls—you're going to win souls. I am telling you, when you get to the bottom line, why did Jesus come to this earth? *"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which [is] lost"* (Luke 19:10). And, you can put all of the Bible into two words—*come* and *go*: *come* to Jesus, and then *go* tell others. That's what it is. *"He that winneth souls is wise"* (Proverbs 11:30).

Now, go back to the verse that we read, and we're going to look today at the soul winner's promise. And, there are four things I want you to see in this passage of Scripture.

I. The Soul Winner's Program

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call "the soul winner's program" in verse 6: "*He that goeth forth*"—"He that goeth forth" (Psalm 126:6). You'll never be a soul winner until you get at it, until you go forth. Nothing will take the place of going. You say, "Well, I don't necessarily go out to be a soul winner, but I do want to live a good life so people will see my life and come to Jesus." Hey, I've got news for you: they're not saved by your life, but by His death. And, if you do not tell them how you live the life that you live, you're taking praise under false pretences. You'll never be a soul winner until you start.

Put this verse in the margin—Mark 16, verse 15: "*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 6:15). And, when He gave the Great Commission, He said, "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). It literally means, "As you go." Now, He's talking here about a person sowing seed. Soul winning is like sowing seed. Well, where do you sow the seed? In the field. You don't sow the seed in the barn; you sow the seed in the field. We need to get this seed out of the barn and out into the field. Where is the field? The field is the world. He's not talking about going to be a missionary to some foreign field; He's talking about...just as you go into the everyday sphere of your life, you win souls.

You know what's wrong with so many churches? We have too many hugs and hallelujahs and not enough heartaches for those on the outside. And, *many of our churches have become sacred societies for snubbing sinners*. We get together in our holy huddles, and we talk about how wonderful it is to have all of this truth. And, we somehow think that to be a good Christian we are to disassociate ourselves from those who are lost. We've somehow gotten the idea that we put the salt in one barrel and the fish in another. But, we are to go into all of the world. We are to go into the highways and the hedges. You say, "But, those people are so sinful. Pastor, they drink. They curse. They tell dirty stories. They gamble. They sleep around." Of course they do—they're sinners. That's what sinners are supposed to do. I mean, you think about it. They're sinners—what else do you expect them to do? They don't know what you know. They're trying to find satisfaction. They think, "Maybe drinking will do it." They think, "Maybe gambling will do it." They think that maybe hilarity and funny stories will do it. They think that the things of this world will do it. Pity them. They don't know what you know. Their problem is not their lying, their drinking, and their carousing; their problem is they don't know Jesus. They need to know the Lord Jesus Christ. And, how are they going to hear of Jesus unless you tell them? We are to be spiritually distinct, but not socially segregated. What we're talking about, friend, is insulation and not isolation. We're to go.

Somebody told about a little boy who told his mother, who wanted him to go

somewhere—he said, “I ain’t going.” She said, “What did you say?” He said, “I ain’t going.” She said, “Johnny, listen—I am not going. You are not going. They are not going. We are not going.” He said to me, “It looks to me ain’t nobody going.” That’s what it looks to me like in the average church—just ain’t nobody going. We’ve got to get up and go!

Luke 14, verse 23: “*And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in*” (Luke 14:23). You say, “Well, we bought and built this place of worship. Let them come.” I can’t find a shred of Scripture in the Bible where the Bible tells the lost to come to church—not one! I can find many where the Bible commands the Church to go to the lost.

I want to ask you a question: Do you find it hard to get to church on Sunday morning? Isn’t it harder to get to church on Sunday morning than to work on Monday morning, especially if you have children? When we had our children (little), we had to start on Saturday night to get there on Sunday morning. And, many times when we got there, we had to get there ’cause we’d lost our religion getting there, amen? I mean it. And, we want to go! We have a desire to be here. What about these others who really don’t care? We ought to thank God if they do come. And, if for some reason they come seeking the Lord, that is wonderful, because the Holy Spirit has drawn them. But, the command is not for them to come; it is for us to go. And so, there is the soul winner’s program. Got it? “*He that goeth forth*” (Psalm 126:6).

II. The Soul Winner’s Passion

Now, here’s the second thing I want you to see: it is the soul winner’s passion. Look at it again: “*He that goeth forth and*”—what is that next word?—“*and weepeth*” (Psalm 126:6). Back up to verse 5: “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy*” (Psalm 126:5). Do you know what is wrong today? We have lost our passion; we’ve lost our tears. It is amazing how many tears are shed today when we have so much to weep over. Are we afraid of our tears? Are we afraid that somebody will think we’re too emotional? Are we afraid that somebody will think that we’re fanatics? I wonder if Jesus was afraid of that when He wept over Jerusalem. I see Jesus as He comes over the brow of the Mount of Olives and He sees the city Jerusalem. And, the Bible says, when He saw the city, He wept. And, the word for *weeping* there is great convulsive tears. Our Lord sobbed from down deep, as great tears coursed down His cheeks, as He looked at Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered you, even as a hen does her chicks under her wings, but ye would not” (Matthew 23:37; Luke 23:34).

I think of the great Apostle Paul. Was he too intellectual, too high and mighty, to weep? A man with a triple PhD (the equivalency of it)—he said in Acts chapter 20 and verse 31: “*Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased*

not to warn every one night and day with tears—“*with tears*” (Acts 20:31). When’s the last time you ever shed a tear over some soul that was mortgaged to the devil? Jeremiah, in the Old Testament, was known as the weeping prophet. He said in Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 1: “*Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*” (Jeremiah 9:1). Tears touch the heart of God. King Hezekiah was told he was going to die, and he prayed—turned his face to the wall and prayed. And, in Isaiah chapter 38, verse 5, God told Isaiah, “*Go...say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears*” (Isaiah 38:5).

I wonder, has God seen your tears? If you don’t have a broken heart for the lost, would I suggest that you go to God and confess it to God as a sin? And, ask God to give you the eyes of the Lord Jesus, who, when He saw the multitudes, the Bible says, “*was moved with compassion*” (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:34). And, if you do not have tears for the lost, it is because you do not have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in you.

There’s the soul winner’s program: “*He that goeth forth*” (Psalm 126:6). There’s the soul winner’s passion: “*He that goeth forth and weepeth*” (Psalm 126:6). The tragedy today is a dry-eyed church in a Hell-bent world. Turn on the television and see the debauchery. Pick up the newspaper—see the tragedy. Look around you and see the confusion, the heartache, the despair, the marching, milling multitudes who do not know. Your heart will be moved with compassion.

III. The Soul Winner’s Power

The third thing I want you to see—not only the soul winner’s program and the soul winner’s passion, but the soul winner’s power. Where is the power? Look in verse 6: “*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed*” (Psalm 126:6). What is that seed? The seed is the Word of God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus plainly said, “*The seed is the word*” (Luke 8:11). And, there’s power in that seed. Hebrews 4, verse 12 says, “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful*” (Hebrews 4:12). The word *quick* is the word *zao*. The word *powerful* is the word *energes*. *Zao* is the word we get our word *zoo* from—a life, or zoology. There’s life in a seed, and because there’s life in a seed, there is incredible power. The Word of God is quick and powerful, and that is the power that the soul winner has. There is power in the Word of God. I have preached it long enough to know that if you keep scattering the seed, it will sprout and give life. And, sometimes the hardest heart will crack.

I read somewhere recently about a countess, a very wealthy woman who knew she was going to die, and she was afraid that somehow her grave might be disturbed. And so, she had the money to have a sarcophagus built around her casket, and she had it

encased in heavy slabs of stone. And then, once this stone was put together, she had great steel bands put around those slabs of stone with that casket encasing her body on the inside. And then, she had inscribed on that sarcophagus, “This grave sealed for eternity.” But, there was a hairline crack, and a small little seed fell in the hairline crack of that great monolithic stone encasement. And, a little seed found enough moisture to begin to sprout. And, it put its little tendrils down, and it began to grow and expand until the roots of a mighty tree just broke asunder that encasement. And, a great tree grew up, and that grave was split apart by the power of a little seed. You know, I’ve seen that happen. I’ve seen people come in here with hearts like concrete with steel bands around them. I’ve seen the Word of God get in—just a little seed, just a seed.

Oh, the soul winner’s power! There’s power in the Word of God. But now, listen—what good is a seed if you don’t sow it? It is not what you know—it is what you sow—that counts. It is not what you know—it is what you sow—that counts. You are to know it in the head, stow it in the heart, and sow it in the world. That is the soul winner’s power. You only reap if you sow. Galatians chapter 6, verse 7: “*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Galatians 6:7). If you want people to believe, you’ve got to give them something to believe. The power is in the seed—the power is in the seed.

IV. The Soul Winner’s Promise

There’s the soul winner’s program: “*He that goeth forth*”—there is the soul winner’s passion—“*and weepeth*”—there’s the soul winner’s power—“*[and beareth] precious seed*” (Psalm 126:6). Now, I want you to see the soul winner’s promise. What is the soul winner’s promise? Look again in verse 6: “*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed*”—here’s the promise. Are you ready for it?—“*shall doubtless*”—underscore the word *doubtless*—“*doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*” (Psalm 126:6). Friend, you shall—and doubtless will—have results.

Now, that doesn’t mean that everybody you witness to is going to get saved. They are not. Not everyone that our Lord witnessed to got saved. The rich, young ruler went away sorrowful. He could never have had a better witness than the Lord Jesus gave to him. Our Lord, in the Gospel of Mark, gave a parable of a sower who went forth to sow, and as he scattered the seed out of his basket, some fell by the wayside. That is, the soil was hard, and it couldn’t get in. Others fell on stony ground. It got in, but it couldn’t get down, because beneath the soil in the subsurface was a rocky ledge. Other seed fell among thorns, and it sprouted. But then, the weeds and the briars came and choked it out. But, some fell on good ground, and it brought forth fruit. “David, it’s not our job to analyze the soil; it’s our job to sow the seed.” In that parable, the sower was Jesus Christ Himself. And, He didn’t say, “Well, that’s bad soil. I won’t put any seed on it,” or, “That’s rocky soil,” or, “There are thorns.” He just sowed the seed (Matthew 13).

Folks, you don't know—you don't know. Many times the person you think is ready to come to Christ—that soil looks so warm and moist and fertile; underneath is a rock ledge. You can't see it, but they're so hard. But, sometimes the soil that you don't think is going to sprout will just bring forth, and blossom, and bloom, and bud, and bear fruit. Just sow the seed—just sow the seed. Everywhere you go, just sow the seed. Ask God to give you an open door. “It is God that gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6). You can't make a seed grow, but you can sow a seed. The Apostle Paul said, “I've sowed. Apollos watered, but it is God that gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6). We are dependent upon Him.

But, there is this promise. If you'll keep sowing, beyond the shadow of any doubt, you will have a harvest. What a joy it will be—what a joy it will be—when you win your first soul to Jesus Christ, if you've never done that. I mean, when somebody says to you, like we heard in the words of this song, “Thank you for giving to the Lord. I'm so glad you did”—when somebody puts a bear hug on you and says, “Thank you for telling me about Jesus”—there's nothing like that.

I preach—I preach—to big crowds sometimes. I've preached to as many as 500,000 people at one time, but I'm going to tell you the truth before God: the greatest joy that I get is handpicked fruit, when I speak to one person face-to-face, heart-to-heart, and tell that person about Jesus Christ. I've had some thrills. I've had some honors. But, nothing is sweeter, more wonderful than introducing somebody to Jesus Christ. *“They that sow in tears [will] reap in joy”* (Psalm 126:5). Did you know that you get more joy out of leading a person to Christ than you got when you got saved? That's true. You get more joy out of leading a person to Jesus Christ than you got when you got saved. And, why is that? Because you know more about what is happening to him than you knew what was happening to you at that time. Isn't that true? You know more now about what is happening to him than you knew what was happening to you when you gave your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, you know that later on, he will discover what he received in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, He says, “We're going to come with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us” (Psalm 126:6). What is a sheave? It's a bundle of wheat. You're harvesting wheat, and you bundle it up and lay it. And then, you harvest another, and you bundle it up and lay it there. And, why do they do that? They're waiting for the Lord of the harvest to come. And, when the Lord of the harvest comes and all those bundles are caught up to meet the Lord of the harvest, what a day that will be! What a day that will be! I mean, when the battle's over, we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves—and to lay the golden grain at Jesus's feet and hear those people say, “Thank you for giving to the Lord.” *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:6).

Conclusion

Say, if your joy is gone, and you're discontented, and you feel that you've never really yet found the purpose of life—you're successful in business; you're envied by your neighbors; and yet, your heart is empty—give yourself to soul winning. You cannot be a faithful Christian—a faithful member of this church—unless you give your heart to bringing souls to Jesus Christ.

There's an old song that haunts me, and I hope it'll haunt you. One line in that song says this:

*Must I go, and empty handed?
Must I meet my Savior so?
[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty handed go?*

—CHARLES C. LUTHER

I was by the bedside of a dying man who loved God with all of his heart, but he wasn't a soul winner. And, in a strange dichotomy, he had been saved, but he'd never won souls. He said to me—and if I were to call his name, many of you would know him—he said to me, "Pastor, I'm not afraid to die, but," he said, "I am ashamed to die because I haven't been a soul winner. I'm not afraid to die. I know I'm saved, but I am ashamed to die because I haven't been a soul winner."

*Must I [die], and empty handed?
Must I meet my Savior so?
[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty handed go?*

Please don't ask God to help you to win ten people. Please ask Him to help you to win one—just one. And, when we get that done, we'll start on another, amen? "*He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*" (Psalm 126:6).

Bow your heads in prayer. Lord, seal the message to our hearts, and help us, Lord, to be faithful witnesses in whatever means that we have at our disposal. In Jesus' name.

Learning to Share Jesus

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 12, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 126:5–6

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”

PSALMS 126:5

Outline

Introduction

- A. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because They Are Valuable
 - 1. Desirability
 - 2. Durability
 - 3. Possibility
- B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of God
- C. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Soul Winner’s Reward
- I. You Must Be Committed to Share Your Faith
- II. You Must Be Concerned When You Share Your Faith
- III. You Must be Consistent as You Share Your Faith
- IV. You Must Be Confident in Sharing Your Faith

Conclusion

Introduction

What a great song! Praise the Lord God. Be finding Psalm 126. And, in a moment, we’re going to look in verses 5 and 6. We’re talking about sharing our faith, and I want to talk to you today about learning to share your faith. And, I pray God that He will take this stammering tongue of mine and plant in your heart a desire to share your faith. When I gave my heart to Jesus Christ as a teen, one of the ways that I know that it was real is this—that I had a deep, deep desire to share what happened to me with my brother, and with my sister, and with my friends. I wanted them to know the Jesus that I had met. And, may I say this to you: if you don’t have a desire to give your faith away, maybe you ought to give it up. You know, we’re not merely told to keep the faith; we’re told to share it.

Now, we talk about a “love worth finding.” Well, friend, if it is a love worth finding, would you not agree that it is a love worth sharing? No matter what else you may do—and I’m grateful to these who sing in the choir, and I’m grateful for these musicians; I’m grateful for these ushers, and I’m grateful for the nursery workers. And, I’m grateful for the offering that you’ll give today, and I’m grateful for the way that you’ve sung—but no

matter what else you may do, if you're not endeavoring to share your faith, in my humble but accurate opinion, you're not right with God. No matter how eloquently you preach, no matter how beautifully you sing, no matter how generously you give, no matter how faithfully you attend, no matter how circumspectly you walk—friend, there is no substitute for sharing your faith with other people.

Now, the Bible says in Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6—look at it, if you will; what a wonderful passage of Scripture: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). Now, the Bible says that if we will go, and sow, and reap, and weep, we will understand the secret of sharing our faith.

You know, again, in another place in the Bible, in Proverbs chapter 11 and verse 30, the Bible says, *“He that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30). Now, how many of you think of yourselves as wise? Now, listen to it again: *“He that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30). Why is it so wise to bring a soul to Jesus Christ, to teach somebody to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ?

A. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because They Are Valuable**

Because of the value of a soul. Remember what Jesus said? Jesus said, *“What [should] it profit a man, if he [should] gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Mark 8:36–37). A soul is so incredibly valuable that Jesus, in this passage of Scripture, taught that one soul is worth more than the whole world—one soul! So, if you won just one soul to Jesus Christ, think what you've done!

Why is a soul so valuable?

1. Desirability

Well, a soul is so valuable, first of all, friend, because of its desirability. Did you know that the devil desires your soul and God desires your soul? How can we tell whether a thing is desirable or not? By the price someone will pay for it. Jesus, with His precious blood, on the cross, died, that a soul might be redeemed. Any appraiser will tell you the value of a piece of property is this—what someone else will pay for it.

I have an evangelist friend who was wasting his life. He was unsaved before he became an evangelist and before Christ got hold of him. He was just throwing his life away, and somebody said to him, “Mike, if you had something that you didn't want, but somebody else wanted it very much, rather than just throwing it away, would you give it to him?” Mike said, “Sure.” He said, “Mike, you're throwing your life away. Jesus wants your soul. Your soul is desirable.” A soul is desirable. Jesus paid His rich, red, royal blood for a soul.

2. Durability

Not only is a soul desirable, but a soul is so durable. Now, the value of any thing is measured not only by its desirability, but its durability. A soul will last for all eternity. Friend, look up here, and let me tell you something: there was a time when you were not; there never will be a time when you will not be. Your soul will go on—endless, dateless, timeless, measureless, through all eternity. When the stars have splintered and faded, your soul will be in existence somewhere. That's the value of a soul. Jesus spoke of those in Hell, and the Bible says they are tormented day and night forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever (Revelation 20:10). The same is true of Heaven. Through all the endless ages, a soul will be in existence, either in Heaven or in Hell.

3. Possibility

Desirability, durability—I'll tell you another thing about a soul: It has possibility. Now, when you see an individual—maybe you see someone in the slums, maybe you see someone who is living in degradation and sin—and you say, "They're worthless." Call no man worthless for whom Jesus died. And, see that soul possibly as a saint. Think of the woman at the well—and Jesus transformed this woman who was living in sin and degradation into a saint. Think of Rahab the harlot, who is now saved and in Heaven, shining as a bright star in the Savior's crown. Think of these people, friend, and the possibility that one day—one day—they can be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. In your seat this morning, there are three possible persons: there's the person you are right now; there's the person you could be for evil, if you fail to follow God; and there's the person you may be, made like unto the likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of God

When you win souls, you're wise because of a value of a soul. And, when you win souls, you're wise because of the command of the Savior. Jesus has commanded us to make disciples. That's not a suggestion; that's not a request. That's the reason I said if you're not endeavoring to share your faith, friend, it's not that you're merely not doing it and missing a blessing. Listen carefully: the Christian who does not share his faith is guilty of high treason against his God. You see, Jesus said, "*Follow me, and I will make you [to become] fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). Now, if you're not fishing for men, by what right of logic do you have to say that you're following Jesus? "*Follow me...I will make you [to become] fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). If you are not fishing, you're not following. Is my logic wrong? No. You're not following Christ.

You are not abiding in Christ. Jesus said in John 15, "If you abide in Me and My Word abides in you, you will bring forth much fruit" (John 15:15). Are you bearing fruit? Are people coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ through your life? Then, you're not

abiding in Christ. Do you love Jesus? Jesus said, “If [you] love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Are you keeping His commandments? What right do you have to say that you love the Lord Jesus Christ if you’re not obeying His chief commandment—to share your faith?

C. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Soul Winner’s Reward**

Why is winning souls so wise? Because of the value of a soul, because of the command of Christ, and because of the reward of the soul winner. Friend, to share your faith in Jesus Christ and to see your brother, your sister, your father, your mother, your friend, your neighbor, your teammate, your schoolmate, or whomever come to Christ brings one of the greatest rewards that life can ever know. If you’ve never shared your faith and seen someone come to Jesus, then you don’t know what I’m talking about. But, what a joy it is to bring people to Jesus Christ! You see, many of us are committed to something. What are you committed to? What really matters? What is going to matter for all eternity?

Now, if you’re a football fan—professional football—you know who Don Shula is. Don Shula, one of the great football coaches of all time, was a coach in the golden days of the Miami Dolphins. And, one time, Don Shula had just about all he could take of football, and he and his wife wanted to get away. And, they thought, “Well, we can go off to New England.” So, they went up to New Hampshire, and there in New Hampshire, they thought, “Nobody will know us up here.” And, they tried to disguise the fact that he was famous. It was raining when they got off the airplane; and so, they checked in the hotel and said, “We’ll take in a movie.” It was a very small little town they were in. And, they went to the movie house, and when they walked in, people started to applaud. Everybody in the theater applauded. Shula thought, “Boy, I can’t even go to a movie in this little town without people knowing me.” A man reached over and took his hand and said, “We’re sure glad to see you.” Shula said, “How do you know me up here?” He said, “Is there any reason I should know you?” He said, “I don’t know you, just—the manager of the theater said he wasn’t going to start the movie until two more people came in.” Friend, I want to tell you something: fame is fleeting. Something that will last for all eternity is to win souls to Jesus Christ.

I. **You Must Be Committed to Share Your Faith**

Now, look at our scripture again, and I want to give you four factors here about sharing your faith. Number one—number one: You must be committed to share your faith. Look at it again; the Bible says here in Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6: “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*” (Psalm 126:5–6).

Now, you must be committed to it. You must be intentional about it. It's easier not to do it than it is to do it.

Now, nothing will take the place of doing this. I often hear people say, "Well, I want to live a good life so people will see my life and want to be saved." Listen to me, my friend: they are not saved by your life; they're saved by His death. And, if you live a good life without letting people know why you live that good life, you're taking praise under false pretenses. Anything good about you is Jesus Christ in you, and you have to share that; and you're never going to be a soul winner until you start. Our Lord tells us to go. Mark 16, verse 15: "*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). Literally, that means in the Greek language "as you go"—"as you go."

Now, I'm so grateful for our fellowship here this morning. Look around: this auditorium is practically filled. And, when you leave this morning, another crowd will come in about the same size. What would happen if all of the members of our church were literally sharing Jesus Christ? *So many churches have become sacred societies for snubbing sinners.* I'm grateful for our fellowship. People have been telling me we've been having a good time in our small groups, and that's great. But friend, hugs and hallelujahs are not enough when there's a world around us dying and going to Hell. Would you agree?

Now, listen—we have to be committed to share our faith. You say, "But Pastor, you don't know these people out there—how they live, the beer, the cursing, the adultery, the filthy jokes." You want me to tell you why they do that? They're sinners; that's what sinners do. You ought not to be surprised they do that. Their major problem is not their cursing and their dirty jokes; their major problem is they don't know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. They need Christ, and we've got to go to them. You say, "Well, I want to be separate." Yes, you need to be separate; you need to be holy. But friend, you need to understand that separation is not isolation. Jesus was a friend of sinners. That's why they crucified Him. They said, "This man is a friend of sinners" (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). Thank God He is, because if He weren't, I wouldn't be here today. And, we need to go share the gospel with them.

A little boy didn't use very good English, and he said, "I ain't going." His mother corrected him and said, "Now Son, it is not 'I ain't going'—you are not going; he is not going; they are not going. Do you understand that?" He said, "Yeah, it looks like ain't nobody going." When I look at the church, I feel that way. But, why is it that we do so little with so much? Dear God, give us an intentionality.

Have you ever thought about it? The unsaved are not commanded to come to church. We say, "Look at these buildings. Look at our program. Why don't they come?" We ought not to be surprised they don't come. There's not one thread of scripture in the

Bible that tells unsaved people to come to church—none. But, I can find scripture after scripture after scripture that tells the Church to go to the unsaved. It's our job to go to them, not to get them to come to us. If you ever go hunting, the deer is not supposed to come to the cabin. We're to go out into the highways and the hedges and compel them to come in.

I'm going to ask you a question: Was it easy for you to get to church this morning? Most of us will say, "No"—and especially if you had kids, if you have kids. You remember when your kids were little and you were trying to get to church on Sunday morning? It's harder to go to church on Sunday morning than it is to get them to go to school on Monday morning. I don't know why it is—I mean, unless the devil just rigs it that way. When our kids were little, we had to start getting ready on Saturday night to get there on Sunday morning and then just did make it. If it weren't for precious Joyce, we wouldn't have made it. One woman said to her husband, "If you'll come in here and help with the kids," or, "If you'll come in here and get the kids ready for Sunday School, I'll sit out front and honk the horn." I mean, by the time we got to church we needed to be there because we lost our religion getting there. Have you ever been that way? And, look, folks—we want to come! We want to come!

What about those who don't care, anyway? And, we think they need to come hear to so they can get saved? Now, when they come here and get saved, I'm grateful, and I'm thankful. But, most of them come because they've been lovingly invited and entreated by someone who cares and someone who loves. But, there must be an intentionality. You must be committed to share your faith.

II. You Must Be Concerned When You Share Your Faith

Number two: Not only must you be committed to share your faith—you must be concerned when you share your faith—when you share your faith. Notice the scripture again—Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6: *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy"* (Psalm 126:5). It is amazing that we have such a lack of tears. I want to ask you this question sincerely: you say you love the Lord Jesus Christ; you say that Christ is in you—do the things that break the heart of Jesus break yours? Are you afraid of tears?

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Jesus, there, on the Mount of Olives, looking at Jerusalem, had great copious tears coming down His cheeks. And, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee, even as a hen doth her chicks, but ye would not" (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). Paul, the great apostle, wept over the unsaved. Acts chapter 20, verse 31: *"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"*—"with tears" (Acts 20:31). When's the last time you shed a tear over some soul that's mortgaged to the devil? Do you weep over the plight of the unsaved, lost, doomed,

damned, on their road to Hell, no hope?

Jeremiah wept over his people: *“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes [as] a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”* (Jeremiah 9:1). Do you know what’s wrong with many churches today? There’s no brokenness; there’s no heartache, no tears. Sunday School classes go on and on without being concerned about the lost. We need to see every person as a brother or as a potential brother, as a sister or a potential sister.

Years ago, I read about an episode that happened in Florida, near Tampa. There was a high-powered boat that was going under a bridge, and it hit a bridge abutment. And, the man in the boat was thrown out of the boat and knocked unconscious, and it looked like he had drowned. And, they had fished that man out of the water, and they had him there. And, they were treating him and giving him artificial respiration, or whatever. And, a man stopped by, parked his car, stopped, and looked, and was concerned. He saw that the boat there was crushed and sinking. And, he saw the crowd, and he saw the man. He watched the medics. He saw all of that, and he was looking. And, he said, “Well, that’s a tragic situation”—trying to sum it all up and figure out how it happened. And, when they turned the man over who was being given this treatment, the stranger looked in the face of a man. And, he said, “My God, that’s my brother!” It was his brother in the flesh. He said, “That is my brother!” He said, “Somebody do something! You get—hey, medic—somebody do something. You people pray. Listen, this man is dying.” And, he was transformed. What was the difference? One time he knew something intellectually; the next time he knew it emotionally. Now, what we need to do is to see every man as a brother or as a potential brother, and not to see them simply, theologically, intellectually. We need to see them emotionally; we need to see them as God sees them—with a broken heart.

If you don’t have a broken heart for the unsaved, I suggest that you get alone and wait before God until God gives you a passion and a compassion. Jesus, when He saw the multitude, was moved with compassion (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14). I’ll tell you, one of the great problems today is, in the words of another, “a dry-eyed Church in a Hell-bent world.” There are people in our auditorium today—when I give the invitation, they’ll start to look at their watch, so they want to get out. They’re not concerned about the lost. They’re not concerned about souls coming to Jesus. They’re not praying during the invitation. Many of us have brothers, and sisters, and fathers, and mothers, and neighbors who, if they die in their state today, are going to die and go to Hell. And, we claim to know the answer. Now friend, we must share our faith with compassion and with love.

III. You Must be Consistent as You Share Your Faith

Now, number three—number three: You must be consistent as you share your faith. Notice what it says again: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing”* (Psalm 126:5–6). The idea of bearing precious seed is just scattering the seed everywhere you go. What is the seed? The seed is the Word of God—the Word of God. Jesus, in the parable of the sower, said, *“The seed is the word”* (Luke 8:11). We are *“born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God”* (1 Peter 1:23). We have the precious Word of God, and everywhere we go we need to be consistent in sharing the seed, because the seed has power.

Years ago, I read about a woman who thought that she would somehow protect her body from decay, or vandalism, or whatever. She was a very rich woman, so she had her body...made plans in her will to have her body buried in a great concrete vault. And then, she had steel bands put around that vault so it could not be opened. And then, she wrote...had written on that steel vault these words: *“Sealed for eternity.”* Do you know what happened? There, it got a hairline crack in that vault, according to the story that I read, and a seed fell in that hairline crack, and sprouted, and began to grow. And, the pressure of that seed and those roots went out, cracked that vault wide open, and a mighty tree grew over that vault. She said it was sealed for eternity, but a seed—one little seed, one powerful seed—cracked that vault wide open. And, I’m telling you, there are people whose hearts are hard as concrete with steel bands around them, but the Word of God is so powerful.

Friend, never, never, never diminish the power of the Word of God. You need to understand what you have in your hand when you have a Bible. It is powerful. *“The word of God is quick, and powerful...sharper than [a] twoedged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12). And, we need to know it in our heads, store it in our hearts, and sow it in the world. *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing”* (Psalm 126:6). Do you want a harvest? Well, you have to sow to have a harvest. The Bible says, *“Whatever we sow we’ll reap”* (Galatians 6:7). You sow the Word of God. You share what Jesus Christ has done for you. You say, *“Well, Pastor, I’m just not trained.”* You don’t even have to be trained—you don’t even have to be trained.

A preacher went into the back of a big department store like a Wal-Mart, or a Target, or whatever. He wanted to buy some fishing tackle. And, he walked back there—all the way back to the back of the store—and he asked this question: he said, *“What is a good bass lure?”* A man’s head snapped around, and he came up to him—just a stranger. He didn’t work there in the store. He didn’t know who the preacher was, but he began to talk to him about bass lures, and hooks, and lines, and boats, and fishing places, and

bass, and bass, and fishing, and lures, and lines, and hooks, and boats, and bass, and fishing, and lines, and hooks, and doors. And, that preacher said, “When I walked out of the department store, that man was still behind me, talking about fish, talking about bass, talking about hooks, talking about lures, talking about lines, talking about boats.” It’s obvious to see where that man’s love was. I don’t—I don’t—ever think that he went to a course that said, “How to Share Your Fishing Ability.” He just had an experience. He wanted to share it. That’s the reason we’re called “witnesses.” We’re not lawyers; we’re witnesses. A lawyer argues a case; a witness tells what he’s seen and heard. And, very frankly, the reason that some don’t witness is they haven’t seen or heard anything. We have the seed. We are to share the Word of God.

IV. You Must Be Confident in Sharing Your Faith

Now, next, and finally, we’re to be confident in sharing—we’re to be confident in sharing our faith. You must be confident in sharing your faith. Notice again Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed”—*here’s the promise now—*“shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). You need to have this confidence.

Now, not everybody you witness to is going to get saved. I dare say most of the people I witness to personally don’t get saved. I don’t bat a thousand. I don’t bat 500. I probably don’t bat 250, in baseball parlance. But, I’ll tell you, some will get saved. When a sower goes out to sow, not all the seed that he sows sprouts. That’s the reason you just have a...you just lavishly sow. You remember the parable there in Mark chapter 4, where the Lord Jesus Christ gave the parable of the sower? Some seed fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and got it. Some fell on stony ground, and it sprang up and then withered. And, some fell among the thorns, and the thorns choked it out. But, some fell on good soil (Mark 4:3–8). You don’t know who’s going to get saved. You just keep sharing your faith. You just keep scattering the seed. It’s God that gives the increase, not you. Your job is to scatter the seed. Sometimes you think the most unlikely people are there, and they will never get saved.

A while back, I got a letter from a man. He said, “Forgive me for not writing you.” He said, “I want to tell you what happened to me.” He said, “Years ago, when you were a pastor in Merritt Island, Florida, I was a long-haired, hippie, surfer type—had a surfboard going down the street on a hot day, and you stopped and picked me up in your automobile. And, you shared Jesus Christ with me. And, I was trying to act cool; I was trying to act like I was paying no attention to you. And, I kind of pretended to brush you off. But, you witnessed to me. You shared Jesus Christ with me, and you prayed with me and let me out of the car.” He said, “Forgive me for not writing you sooner and

telling you this, but I never got your witness out of the heart until I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. And, God has saved me, and now I'm a preacher of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Now, I didn't know that. As a matter of fact, I had to think hard to even remember the incident after I got the letter, because that's...you're just throwing out the seed. You don't know when somebody is going to get saved and when they're not. But friend, if you'll go, and weep, and pray, and share, and give—and always do it consistently—you're going to find out that you will have the greatest joy in the world, and that is the joy of coming with your sheaves to lay at Jesus's feet—the golden grain. *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:6).

Now, you tell me, "Pastor Rogers, it won't work—it won't work." When you tell me it won't work, do you know what you're telling me? I'll tell you what you're telling me: you're telling me, friend, that you're not trying it. You're telling me that you're not doing it, because I'm telling you that God's Word says, *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:6). Sometimes it takes a long time for your crop to harvest—the harvest to come in.

Some years ago, in our city, there was a man that I got a burden for. He was in the medical field—a doctor—and he was one of the sons of Abraham. He was a Jew, but a dear man. I loved him, and he loved me. And, he would catch me sometimes preaching on television; and when he'd see, he would say, "You know, you're a good talker." That's what he called me—a "talker." And, we would talk and so forth, and I began—slowly at first, and then more strongly—to share Jesus with this dear man. We became friends. Went to the Memphis State ballgames many times together. He had season tickets, had special seats, and we would go to the ballgames together, and talk, and laugh, and enjoy the ballgame. That's back when Memphis State was called "Memphis State." And, I began to get bolder and bolder sharing Jesus with this man.

Finally, one time, he said to me, "Adrian," he said, "Every time we're together, you're talking to me about Jesus. Now, you know who I am. You know my background. You know my family. Don't always be talking to me about Jesus. Can we just have a good time without you talking to me about Jesus?" I said, "Well, Irving, yes, we can have a good time without my talking to you about Jesus, and I won't talk to you about Jesus. But Irving, I want you to know what I'm thinking." And, I said, "Irving, this is what I'm going to be thinking"—told him about Jesus. And, I said, "Now, if I'm not talking to you, you're smart enough to know what I'm thinking." And so, we continued to be friends.

Years passed, and I continued to pray for this man. He had a serious heart attack. I went to the hospital to see him, and he said to me, "Adrian, I was at a funeral that you preached a while back. Oh," he said, "what you said about Heaven was wonderful." I

said, “Irving, I don’t want to be there without you.” He said, “Don’t start that again.” I said, “Irving, here you are on perhaps a deathbed, and you’re telling me not to start that again. You may be just a heartbeat from eternity.” He sat up in bed, put his feet on that little stool and that white gown, and looked at me, and he said, “All right. Tell me about it.” And, I told him about it, and I said, “Now, let’s pray.” And, he prayed and asked Christ into his heart. After months and years of love and faithfulness, he prayed and asked Christ into his heart. I went home from that hospital that night. I walked out in the darkness. I took my keys, and I threw them in the air. And, it was so dark I didn’t know where they landed. I was just so happy, just so thrilled, that God gave me the privilege to bring just one soul to Jesus Christ. *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:6).

Conclusion

You know, my brother, there’s no greater joy than bringing a soul to Jesus Christ, but all of us have to get jumpstarted every now and then. It’s so easy to go to church, to study our Bible, to have our devotions, to do what we do—and it’s all good—but friend, would you not say, “Lord Jesus, help me to share”? *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:6). All the soul winning you’re ever going to do you’ll do in this world and in this life. One of these days, you’re going to meet the Savior. I just met a person over there just a few moments ago—said, “Pastor, my mama died this morning—just a few moments ago. I just got it on my phone.” We went and had prayer. One of these days, I’m going to die; you’re going to die.

*Must I go and empty handed?
Must I meet my Savior so?
[Without] one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty handed go?*

—CHARLES C. LUTHER

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. And, would you, friend, begin to pray that God would make you a soul winner? Would you pray that God would give you a burden for the unsaved? And, maybe say, “Lord, lay a particular soul upon my heart, not just the world—that’s fine—not America or Memphis, but Lord, some soul upon my heart. And, help me to share my faith.”

And now, friend, if sharing faith is so important, certainly, receiving Jesus is important—receiving what is being shared. And, I’ve shared Jesus with you today. If you’re not saved, you can be saved. Let me tell you that you must acknowledge that you are a sinner and that your sin deserves judgment, and punishment, and eternal

death in Hell. But, also believe that God still loves you. And, God, in mercy, allowed His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die upon the cross for you to pay your sin debt with His precious blood. And, He has done that, and that Jesus is proven to be the Son of God when God raised Him from the dead. And, He said in His Word that if you would trust Him, He'll save you. The Bible says clearly and plainly, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31). Will you believe on Him today? Will you trust Him? Will you, right now?

Then, let me guide you in a prayer. Pray this prayer: "Dear God"—that's right. You can speak to Him. He's listening to you, right now. Forget anyone else is here. Pray this prayer—"Dear God, I know that I'm a sinner. I know that I'm lost. I need to be saved. I want to be saved. Jesus, You died to save me and promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You, Jesus. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Save me, Jesus"—pray it and mean it, friend—"Save me, Jesus. Save me, Lord Jesus."

Did you ask Him? Then, pray this way: "Thank You for doing it, Jesus. I receive it by faith. I stand on Your Word. That settles it. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be, and give me the courage to make it public. In Your name I pray. Amen."

Now, look up here. We're going to sing an invitational hymn. I'm going to ask the ministers of our church to stand at the head of each of these aisles all the way across the front to receive those of you who'll be coming. If you're in the balcony, there'll be somebody under that banner over there that says, "Redeemer" to welcome you, and that one over there that says, "Messiah" for those on this side. And, when we stand and sing, I'm going to ask you, if you prayed that prayer and asked Christ into your heart, to leave your seat and come forward.

Or, if you still need some help—there are things you don't understand and you need some help; if you haven't got it settled yet, but you want Jesus—I want you to leave your seat, and come forward, and say to the minister, "I'm trusting Jesus," or, "I want to trust Jesus. I need some more help." And, we'll take an open Bible, and guide you in this decision, and seal it in prayer. It'll take just a few moments. There's something about an open, public acknowledgement of Christ that settles it, and seals it, and shames the devil, and gives glory to God. If I could do it for you, I would, but I cannot. I've done the best I know how. It's your decision now. Jesus said, "If you confess Me before me, I'll confess you before My Father. If you deny Me before men, I'll deny you before My Father" (Matthew 10:32–33).

Others of you special friends who know Jesus—you need a church home; you need to be a part of a local fellowship. That's what the Bible teaches. If you need a church home and you know you're saved, I want you to come forward, also. And, I want you to say, "I want to place my membership here," and we'll tell you how. Respectfully, I'm going to ask that no one leave during the invitation. You'll disturb other worshipers. Be

in a spirit of prayer, and be praying for these who'll come. If you're with a friend who needs to come, you may volunteer to come forward with your friend.

Let's bow our heads together. Father God, I pray now in the name of Jesus that You'll bring many, many to Him. Thank You, Lord. Amen. Let's stand together. You step out and come as we sing.

Learning to Share Jesus

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 12, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 126:5–6

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

PSALMS 126:6

Outline

Introduction

- A. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because They Are Valuable
 - 1. Desirability
 - 2. Durability
 - 3. Possibility
- B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of Christ
- C. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Soul Winner’s Reward
- I. You Must Be Committed to Share Your Faith
- II. You Must Be Concerned When You Share Your Faith
- III. You Must Be Consistent as You Share Your Faith
- IV. You Must Be Confident in Sharing Your Faith

Conclusion

Introduction

Well, amen. Go forth in Jesus’s name. “Forty Days of Purpose”—we’ve been thinking about worship. We’ve been thinking about fellowship. We’ve been thinking about discipleship. And today, we are thinking about evangelism. When you think of evangelism, what do you really think about? A Billy Graham crusade? Somebody going from door to door passing out tracts? What is evangelism? Watch this... Well, that’s interesting. What do you think evangelism is?

Be finding Psalm 126, and in a few moments, we’re going to look at some verses there. From the time I got saved to this moment there has been a desire in my heart to share Jesus Christ. I wanted my brother to know. I wanted my sister to know. I wanted my friends to know. And, that’s one of the ways I know that what I believe is real to me—is because I want to share it; I want to give it away. Now, we’re told to keep the faith. Friend, not only are we to keep the faith—we are to give it away. And, if you have no desire to give it away, maybe you ought to give it up; maybe you don’t have the real thing to share the Lord Jesus Christ with all of your heart and with all of your soul.

Now, look, if you will, in God's Word—Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6—a great promise filled with great truth: *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:5–6). I want to talk to you today about learning to share Jesus. *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:6).

Do you consider yourself to be a wise person? Do you really? Do you think you're wise? Well, let me tell you what the Bible says about wisdom: the Bible says, *"He that winneth souls is wise"* (Proverbs 11:30). Now, why is a person wise who wins souls? Well, let me give you some reasons.

A. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because They Are Valuable**

And, they're all wrapped up in the value of a soul. Remember what the Lord Jesus said: *"What [should] it profit a man, if he [should] gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36–37). Now, that indicates to me that Jesus is saying that one soul is worth more than the whole wide world. All the silver, all the gold, all the rubies, all the diamonds, all the stocks, all the bonds, all the ships, all the railroads, all the buildings, all the real estate, all of the factories, all of the homes, all of the goods, all of the chattel—one soul is worth more than all of that. Do you believe that? *"What [should] it profit a man, if he [should] gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). Why, therefore, is it so wise to win souls? A soul is so valuable. What determines value?

1. Desirability

Well, I'll tell you, one thing that determines value is desirability. Any appraiser will tell you that the value of something is measured by what someone will pay for it. Isn't that true? You have a piece of property, and you want to know what it's worth—get an appraiser, and he'll tell you it's worth what somebody will pay for it. What is your soul worth? Jesus shed His precious blood. *"[We] were not redeemed with corruptible things, [such] as silver and gold...But with the precious blood of [Jesus] Christ"* (1 Peter 1:18–19)—by every drop of blood that fell to the ground. He is talking about the worth of a precious human soul.

I have an evangelist friend. Before he was saved, he was throwing his life away. Somebody said to him, "Mike, if you had something you don't want, and somebody wanted it very, very much, would you give it to him?" He said, "Of course." He said, "Mike, Jesus wants your life, your soul. If you don't want it, don't throw it away. Give it to Him." That brought Mike to Christ. He became an evangelist. Now, I'm telling you, friend, that desirability determines the worth of a soul.

2. Durability

I'll tell you something else that determines the worth of a soul—not only desirability, but durability. You want to know what something is worth? How long will it last? Your soul, made in the image of God, could no more cease to exist than God Himself could cease to exist. Your soul will go on—endless, timeless, dateless, measureless. When the stars have splintered and faded, your soul will be in existence somewhere, either in Heaven or in Hell. Precious friend, there was a time when you were not. There never, ever again will be a time when you will not be. Your soul is made for eternity, and that gives it such significance—that gives it such value.

3. Possibility

I'll tell you another thing that talks to me about the value of a soul, and that's the possibility. You see, every person that you see—don't look at them for what they are; think of them for what they could be. That person on Skid Row, that person who has needle marks tracked up and down his arm, that woman who has sold herself on the streets to become the dirty plaything of dirtier men, that cutthroat businessman, that cold-blooded sinner who harms other people—don't see him for what he is; see him for what he could be. See, the harlot Rahab transformed into the likeness of Christ. She's there sitting in the Kingdom at the feet of Jesus right now. I'm telling you, friend, that one day, by the grace of God, every soul can be made like unto Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? Word.

Now, that's what makes a soul so precious—not for what it is right now, but for what it could be. And, may I say to you, occupying the chair that you're in this morning are really three persons: the person you are now; the person you could be for evil, if you don't yield your heart to the Lord; and the person you can be and will be by the grace of God, if you're saved—and, one day, at the Rapture, caught up, transformed, and made to be like the Lord Jesus Christ; and progressively now, being made more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, why is soul winning wise? Because of the worth of a soul.

B. It Is Wise to Win Souls Because It Is a Command of Christ

Number two: Because of the command of Christ. Now, you're wise to obey the command of Christ, and our Lord has commanded us to share. Now, if you're not sharing your faith, you're not merely missing a blessing—you are guilty of high treason against Heaven's King, because He has commanded. He said, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"—now, watch this—"teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). Disobedience is a clenched fist in the face of God because God has commanded it.

You say you love the Lord. Do you? Well now, listen—Jesus said, “*If [you] love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). The rest is just religious talk. How can you say that you love Him, and you’re not interested in that which is His heart, as we’ve seen in this video presentation during the music? That’s the heart of God. You see, obedience and sharing show that we are abiding in Jesus. He said, “*If [you] abide in me, and my words abides in you, [then you] ask what [you] will, and it shall be done unto you*” (John 15:7). Sharing Jesus shows that you’re following Jesus. He says, “*Follow me, and [I’ll] make you [to become] fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). Now, see if my logic is correct. He said—Jesus said, “*Follow me... [I’ll] make you [to become] fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). Is it true then, therefore, if you’re not fishing, you’re not following? Jesus said, “*Follow me*” (Matthew 4:19). Friend, you are disobeying the Lord if you’re not sharing Jesus Christ. You’re not abiding in the Lord. You don’t love the Lord. You don’t follow the Lord.

C. **It Is Wise to Win Souls Because of the Soul Winner’s Reward**

Now, why, therefore, should we do it? Because of the value of a soul. Why, therefore, should we do it? Because of the demand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why, therefore, should we do it? Because of the reward of the soul winner. “*He that winneth souls is wise*” (Proverbs 11:30). One of these days, we’re going to stand at the feet of Jesus Christ. One of these days, I, Adrian—you, put your name there—are going to stand before the Lord. We’re going to give an account of our stewardship. One of these days, I’m going to have to face the Lord with His question to me: “Adrian, I saved you. I redeemed you. I gave you new life. I gave you opportunity. Did you share?” I don’t want to stand there having not shared the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t want to stand there without some golden grain to lay at Jesus’s feet. I want to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Must I go and empty handed?

Must I meet my Savior so?

[Without] one soul [one soul, one soul] with which to greet Him,

Must I empty handed go?

—CHARLES C. LUTHER

I don’t want to stand before the Lord that way.

I spoke to a man who’s a member of this church and a denominational worker. He was on his deathbed. I went in to see him and visit with him. He said, “Pastor, I am not afraid to die—I’m not afraid to die. I know Christ. I’m saved. Before long, I’ll be in His presence.” And then, through tears he said to me, “Pastor, I am not afraid to die, but I am ashamed to die because I’ve never been a soul winner.” That was a man—long-time member of this church, denominational worker, and a good man in many ways, but

ashamed to die. One of these days, we're going to stand before the Lord, and we may hang our heads in shame.

Now, this psalm, Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6—I want you to look at these verses again: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). One of these days, we're going to stand before the Lord. Many of the things that we think are so important now are not going to be important. Fame, wealth, prestige—it all fades.

If you watch professional football and have been watching for very long, you know the name Don Shula. Don Shula was an all-time great coach for the Miami Dolphins. And, back in the hay day, the golden days of the Dolphins, Shula was beleaguered with people, besieged with people, who wanted his autograph—to be around him. He and his wife, after the football season, decided they needed to get away. They said they're going to New England to a little, small town in New England just to kick back—didn't want to see any body they knew, tried to be anonymous, and so forth. And, when they landed there, it was raining. So, they said, “Well, we'll just take in a movie.” And, a very small, little town, a little movie house, movie theater—they went in, just a handful of people there. But, when they came in, everybody applauded—everybody applauded. Shula said, “How about this? Everybody knows me here.” One man reached over and took him by the hand, and Shula said, “How is it that you know me?” He said, “Is there any reason I should know you?” He said, “Well, you were applauding.” He said, “Yes, we were all applauding because the manager said he was not going to start the movie until at least two more people came in.” Our fame will fade. The moth, the rust, the dust will get our possessions. What are you doing that has eternal value? *“He that winneth souls is wise”* (Proverbs 11:30).

Now, let me give you four thoughts here.

I. You Must Be Committed to Share Your Faith

Number one: You must be committed to share your faith—you must be committed to share your faith. *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth”* (Psalm 126:5–6). You must go forth. In my humble opinion, an accurate opinion, you're not going to become a true witness until you get intentional about it. You have to make a decision. You have to get intentional about it. And, by the way, nothing else will take the place of this.

You know what the common excuse for most of us is? “Well, I may not be a verbal witness, but I want people to see my life and by my life will come to the Savior.” Friend, they're not saved by your life; they're saved by His death. And, if you just live a good life and don't tell them why and how, aren't you taking praise under false pretense? Now, if

you want them to believe, you've got to give them the gospel. And, you're not going to be a soul winner without intentionality until you commit yourself to do so. Mark 16, verse 15: Jesus "said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). That is, literally, "as you go."

Now, *many of our churches have become sacred societies for the snubbing of sinners*. We get together, and we say, "Isn't it wonderful? Look at the love. Look at our wonderful church. Look at our buildings. Look at our fellowship. Look at our organization." Friend, there's a lost world out there, and we need something more than hugs and hallelujahs. We need to go to them.

Now, you say, "But Pastor, you don't know how those people live. You don't know about their drinking. You don't know about their cursing. You don't know about their filthy jokes. You don't know about their adultery. You don't know about their throat cutting with one another. They are awful, and I am a Christian. Pastor, you don't know what they're like." Well, friend, I know what they're like. They're sinners. You know why they do that? That's what sinners are supposed to do. Their problem is not that they drink, or steal, or curse, or commit adultery. Their problem is they don't know Jesus—they need Jesus. And, without Jesus, we ought not to just scold them for what they do. It's like trying to scold a Billy goat for butting. That's what they're like. Well, you say, "Well, I don't want to contaminate myself." Well, Jesus was a friend of sinners, but yet without sin. What we need to do is to learn the art of separation, not isolation.

Now, if you become like those that you run with, then that's terrible. Jesus never sinned, but He loved the lost. And, by the way, you say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, we built this great church. We advertised on radio, television. We invite people to come. That's all right. Can't they just come?" Friend, there's not one scripture—not one—that commands a lost man to come to church. I can tell you many that command the Church to go to the lost. We ought not to think it strange they don't come. You know what the world's been trying to tell us? "Make your church beautiful and attractive. Put up signs so they'll know where you live. Advertise on the radio, on the television. Advertise in newspapers. Get out brochures, and we're still not coming." That's what the world is trying to tell us. Now, some will come, but the vast majority—they come by the handful; they stay away by the thousands. We ought not to think it strange they don't come.

May I ask you a question? Do you find it hard to get to church on Sunday morning? You really do—and especially if you have children, right? When our kids were little, we had to start on Saturday night to get ready for Sunday morning. And still, Sunday morning we weren't ready. And, it was phonetic and frantic, and by the time we got to church we needed to be there because we lost our religion getting there. One woman said to her husband, "Would you do me a favor? You come in here and help get the kids ready for Sunday School; I'll go sit in the driveway and honk the horn." It's difficult—it's

difficult. And, friend, listen to me: we want to come—we want to come. What about those who really don't want to come anyway? Can you imagine how easy it is for them just to roll over and go to sleep again, or just stay there involved in the morning newspaper, the sports page, and the funny papers? Why? Because they don't know what we know, and we're to go to them. And so, you must be committed to share your faith.

II. You Must Be Concerned When You Share Your Faith

Number two: You must be concerned when you share your faith. *“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed”* (Psalm 126:6). Now, again, *“they that sow in tears shall reap in joy”* (Psalm 126:5). I'm amazed that we have so few tears. You know, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. I see Jesus coming down the Mount of Olives, looking at Jerusalem—Hell-bent, Hell-bound, smoldering with judgment in front of them, smoldering judgment before them—and Jesus stretched out His hands and wept great salty tears: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee, even as a hen doth her chicks, and ye would not”* (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). The Apostle Paul wept. He told the Ephesian elders, *“Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every [man] night and day with tears”—“with tears”* (Acts 20:31). When's the last time you shed a tear over some soul that was mortgaged to the devil? I mean, do you care?

Perhaps the worst thing is not that we don't win souls; perhaps the worst thing is not that we don't share. The worst thing is that we don't even care. Now, I know that you have an intellectual feeling about it, but do you have a tender and a sympathetic heart? The Bible says, *“When Jesus saw the multitudes as they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep without a shepherd,”* the Bible says, *“He was moved with compassion”* (Matthew 9:36).

Some years ago, I read a story I've never been able to forget. It took place in my home state of Florida—over in the Tampa area, as I remember. A man was driving a high-powered boat. He tried to go underneath a bridge, somehow lost control, hit a bridge abutment, and the boat was wrecked, and the man was seriously injured. They fished him out of the water. They were trying to resuscitate him to keep him alive. They were giving him some sort of artificial respiration, or they were doing something on him—the medics who were there. And, this man drove up, and he looked; and he saw that the boat had been wrecked. He saw the crowd there. He saw the ambulance there, and he saw the medics there. And, the man's trying to figure out the situation. And, he was thinking, *“You know, that's tragic. Look at that. That could happen just like that. One moment here's a man in a boat, and the next moment he's hanging by a thread between life and death.”* And, as he got up closer to look, they turned the face of the

man who was on the ground being ministered to, and the man said, “My God, that’s my brother.” It was his own brother in the flesh. He had no idea. He looked down. He said, “That is my brother!” At that moment, the man was transformed. He said, “Hey, somebody do something. Help this man, medic. Listen, people, pray. Here’s a man in danger. Pray for him that he’ll not die.” And, he was transformed. What was the difference? One time he had an intellectual belief; the next time he had an emotional conviction: “That is my brother.”

Now, you can sit here, and listen to me preach, and get it on your notepad. And, you can say, “Yes, I understand this or that.” But, what I’m praying is that that will grip your heart. That man, that woman, that boy, that girl, that friend, that neighbor is your brother or your sister, or a potential brother or sister, in the Lord. And, we need to see every man through the eyes of Jesus Christ, and we need to have a concern to weep, to care, to pray, to be moved with tears. Tears are tangible tokens of our concern, for the Lord Jesus was moved with compassion.

Now, look up here, and let me tell you something: if you do not have a compassionate heart for the lost, you need to get alone before God and wait until He gives you one, because something is wrong in your heart. If your heart is cold for the unsaved, either you’ve never had an experience with Jesus Christ yourself or you’re terribly backslidden.

III. You Must Be Consistent as You Share Your Faith

Now, number three: not only must you be compassionate and concerned, but you must be consistent as you share your faith—be consistent as you share your faith. Again, look, if you will, in verses 5 and 6: “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed*” (Psalm 126:5–6). Now, what we do, everywhere we go, we are to consistently share the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not something we turn on or turn off. We are to be sharing and bearing precious seed. What is the seed? The seed is the truth, the Word of God. Jesus, in the parables, in Mark chapter 4, said to us that “*the seed is the word*” (Luke 8:11). And, a seed has life; a seed has power. Now, you’re not going to get people saved until you sow the seed. Now, yes, you share your testimony. I’ve already said that. Yes, you live the life in front of them. But, what...somehow, you must give them the truth, the kernel of truth. A seed has power.

Now, it has incredible power. Some years ago, I read a story about a woman who feared that somehow her grave would be disturbed. She was a very wealthy woman. And so, she had her casket encased in a great concrete vault—very thick, reinforced concrete. Then, around that concrete vault, she had placed steel bars to bar it in. And then, she had inscribed on her grave, “Sealed for Eternity.” But, you know what

happened? There was a little hair crack got in that vault, and a seed fell in that hair crack, and began to grow and expand, and sent its roots out, and cracked that vault open. And, a mighty tree stands over that cracked open vault. Now, there are people whose hearts are like that—hard as concrete with steel bands around them. But, I'm telling you something, folks: there's power here—there's power here. There is power in the Word of God that can crack open the hardest heart. I've seen it happen more than once. And, I know that the seed is the Word of God, and we must consistently sow the seed, because we're not going to reap if we don't sow. "[Whatever] a man [sows], that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Now friend, you may say, "Well, Pastor Rogers, I don't know how." Well, you don't have to know how. You say, "Wait a minute. Don't you believe in all this training you've been giving us?" Yes, I believe that, but you don't have to know how. Didn't Jesus say, "[You] shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8)? He didn't say, "You're to be my lawyers." He said, "You're to be my witnesses." Now, a lawyer argues a case; a witness tells what he has seen and heard. Do you know the reason why some people are not witnesses? They haven't seen or heard anything. I mean, has Jesus Christ saved you? Do you know how He saved you? Are you saved? Couldn't you share that?

A man went into a department store—like the Target store, or the K-Mart, or one of these big stores. He went to the back to buy some fishing tackle. He was a preacher. And, he asked about a bass lure. He said, "Can you tell me what is a good lure for bass?" When he said that, there was a man over here. His head wheeled around. He moved up, and he began to talk to this man about bass lures, and about lines, and about rods, and reels, and boats, and fishing places. And, he talked, and talked, and talked. As the pastor thanked him and turned to go out of the store, the man just went with him talking about bass lures, and lines, and fish, and boats, and places to fish. The man kept on walking, walked out to his car to get in his car. Here was this same man behind him talking about bass lures, and fishes, and fish, and lines, and boats, and places to fish. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to find out that that man loved to fish for bass. I mean, here was a man who was a bass fisherman. He knew what he was talking about. He loved it, and he wanted to share it with a friend. Now, I doubt very seriously he had ever gone to a course on how to share good bait. I doubt that at all. He just had an experience. He believed in what he was talking about, and he wanted to share it. Friend, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, some way, some how, I believe with all of my heart you'll be able to share it. Don't you? You see, has Jesus Christ done something for you? How did He do it? Somebody has wisely said, "A Christian with a glowing testimony is worth a library full of arguments."

IV. You Must Be Confident in Sharing Your Faith

Number four: You must be confident in sharing your faith—you must be confident in sharing your faith. Now, notice again that psalm—Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6: *“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed”—now, listen to this—“shall doubtless”—underscore that—“doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”* (Psalm 126:5–6). There are no *ifs*, *ands*, and *buts* about it—the seed is powerful. You sow the seed enough, it will sprout.

Now, don’t get the idea that every person you witness to is going to come to Jesus, because that is not true. Every person that Jesus witnessed to did not come to Him. In Mark chapter 4, I’ve already referenced the parable of the sower. Some seed fell by the wayside; the fowls got it. Some seed fell on stony ground, and the birds got it. Some seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns choked it out. But, some seed fell on stony ground (Mark 4:3–8). Everybody that I witness to doesn’t get saved. I don’t bat a thousand. I don’t think half the people I witness to get saved—maybe not 10% of them. But, I’m going to tell you this much: you share Jesus Christ and keep on throwing out the seed, and some of it will sprout, because, you see, it’s not you; it’s the seed. We sow the seed. God gives the harvest. And, it’s our job just to scatter the seed—just scatter the seed. Everywhere, you do scatter the seed. Never lose sight. You must do it consistently, and you must do it confidently. You must do it compassionately, and you must do it convictionally. You just share Jesus Christ with everybody you meet, and you don’t know what’s going to happen.

I got a letter a while back from a person. He said, “Forgive me for not writing you much, much sooner. I have failed to do so, but I should have done so.” He said, “When I was a young man and you were pastor in Merritt Island, Florida, I was a long-haired hippie-type—a surfer. And, I was going down the street on a hot day, and you stopped your automobile, and picked me up and my surfboard, and put me in your car and carried me where I needed to go. And, the whole time you were driving along with me you were sharing Jesus Christ.” He said, “I made out like I wasn’t paying any attention. I made out like it didn’t affect me. But,” he said, “I never got your witness out of my heart. You stopped the car, and prayed for me, and sent me my way.” He said, “What you shared with me was a seed planted in my heart, and I finally gave my heart to Jesus Christ.” He said, “Now, I am a minister of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Not only did God save me—God has called me to preach. And, I want to just write you and tell you thank you for being faithful.” When I got the letter, I had to think real hard: “When was that? I don’t even remember that.” I did finally remember it, but many times we just sow seed. We don’t know what seed is going to sprout. Sometimes it takes seed a long time to sprout. Sometimes a seed just will lie dormant.

I had a man—Joyce and I had a man—that we loved very much. He was a doctor.

He was one of the sons of Abraham; he was a Jew. And, we witnessed to him. This man loved me, and I loved him. He admired me, and he said, "I enjoy listening to you when you talk." And, he said, "You're a good talker." And, we got this conversation going, but he was very intellectual and very interested in the all kinds of things. I began to share Jesus Christ with him, and he was nice to me, but he reminded me of his background and ethnicity. And, but, we became friends, and we began to go to football games—excuse me, basketball games—together at Memphis State. That's what it was called then; it's now the University of Memphis. And, we would sit in the stands. He had season tickets. And, we would go, and I would talk to him about Jesus—about being saved. One day, he said to me, "Adrian," he said, "I love you. We're good friends. But," he said, "every time we get together you're talking to me about becoming a Christian—about Jesus." And, he said, "Adrian, couldn't we just go out and have a good time together, watch a ballgame, without you always talking to me about Jesus?" He said, "You know how I feel about that." I said, "Well, Irving, I want to be a good friend to you, but what I'm talking to you about is very, very important." "Well," he said, "couldn't we just—couldn't we just—put it aside for a while?" I said, "Irving, I'll tell you what: I'll make a deal with you—I won't talk to you about Jesus any more when we're going to a ballgame, or whatever, if you'll promise me you'll remember what I'm thinking." He did, so we had a little deal like that. It might have been much better than my talking because he already knew what I was thinking. And so, we just kind of had a standoff there.

One day, he got sick. This was years that we visited, and witnessed, and fellowshiped with one another. And, one day, he got sick. He had a heart attack. I went to the hospital to see him, and he said to me, "Adrian, I was at a funeral a while back that you preached—a funeral—and you talked about Heaven." He said, "Adrian, that was beautiful what you said about Heaven." I said, "Irving, I don't want to be there without you." He said, "Now, don't start that again." I said, "Now, wait a minute. Don't tell me, 'Don't start that again.' Here you are in the hospital bed with a heart attack—maybe a heartbeat from eternity—and you're telling me not to start that again. Irving, you need Jesus." When I said that, he sat up in bed, swung his feet over the side of the bed, put them on that little stool. Wearing that white gown, he looked at me. He said, "All right. Tell me about it." And, I told him about it, and I prayed with him; and he prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into his heart. And, I believe that Jesus saved him. I could not tell you the joy that was in my heart. I walked out of that William Bowld Hospital downtown. It was dark. I had my car parked on the street. I was so happy I reached in my pocket to get my keys, and I just said, "Praise the Lord!" And, I threw my keys as high as I could in the air, and I lost them. It was dark, and I had to search around, praising the Lord, 'till I found my keys.

Friend, I want to tell you something: the seed may sprout, and you don't even know

it—like that surfer. Or, the seed may lie there for a long time dormant before it sprouts, or it may never sprout. But, I'm telling you, *"he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:6). And, if you say it will not work, you know what you're telling me? You're not doing it—you're not doing it—because, friend, you can—you will—know the joy of bringing people to Jesus Christ. If you can't win a member of your family, win a member of somebody else's family. If you can't win a young person, win an older person. If you can't win a neighbor, win somebody else's neighbor. But, go everywhere scattering the seed.

What would happen—what would happen—if all the members of our church really said, "Lord, I want Your purpose in my life. I want—I want—to be a part of something bigger, something greater than just drawing my breath and drawing my salary. I want to go to Heaven, and I want to take as many people with me as I can. Lord, I want to worship You. I want to have fellowship. I want to be a disciple. But, O my God, I want to find my ministry of bringing people to Jesus Christ"? *"He that winneth souls is wise"* (Proverbs 11:30). And, God's people said amen.

Conclusion

Bow your heads in prayer. Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. Now, would you say, "Lord Jesus, I want to renew my heart to You in this matter of witness. I want, dear Lord, to find my purpose in life. And, I know in that purpose You've called me to share my faith"? Now, tell the Lord that you will do it. Tell Him that you're not going to make any more excuses and that you will do it. Now, I'm not talking about buttonholing people. I'm not talking about getting in peoples face and becoming rude and obnoxious. I'm just talking about having a compassionate heart to share the love of Jesus.

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if, precious friend, you have never received Jesus, you're wondering, "What is all of this about sharing Jesus?" It's because people need the Lord, as we've sung today, and you need the Lord. And, He's knocking at your heart's door, and He wants to come in. He said, *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man [will] hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him"* (Revelation 3:20). He's not going to force His way in. The doorknob is on the inside. Would you open the door? You say, "Pastor, how do you open the door?" By faith. The Bible says, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 16:31). The Bible says, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God"* (Romans 5:1). You put your faith where God has put your sins—on the Lord Jesus Christ—and He will save you, I promise—better than that, He promises. Are you ready to pray? Forget any one else is here. And, right now, this morning—this morning, now—right now where you are sitting in that chair this morning, I want you to give your heart to

Jesus, okay?

Right now, I want you to pray this prayer: “Dear God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me”—and He does, friend. He loves you, and He wants to save you—“Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You, Jesus”—would you tell Him that?—“I do trust You, Jesus. You are the Son of God. You shed Your blood for my sins. You promised to save me, and I trust You to do it. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Come into my life. Take control of my life. I yield it over to You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior today. Now, I’m weak, and You’ve got a lot of work to do on me, Lord, but I give You permission to start. And, begin now to make me the person You want me to be. And, help me, Lord Jesus, never to be ashamed of You, because You died for me. Thank You for saving me, Lord Jesus. And, Lord Jesus, if You’ll just give me the courage, I’ll make it public this morning. I’ll not be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

Now, look up here. If you prayed that prayer and were sincere, I believe you have every reason to believe that God did what you asked Him to do. “Well, Pastor, how can I know if I’m sincere?” Do you know one of the great ways that you can know? Are you willing to make it public? Jesus said, “If you are ashamed of Me before men, I’ll be ashamed of you before My Father in Heaven” (Mark 8:38). Jesus said, “If you confess Me before men, I’ll confess you before My Father” (Matthew 10:32). That means to me that *the faith that doesn’t lead to confession will not lead to Heaven.*

Here’s the way we allow people to confess Christ in this church, or invite them to do so. We sing an invitational hymn, and we ask people who have given their hearts to Jesus to come forward, openly, publicly, unashamedly. And, their coming forward is their way of saying, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and I’m giving my heart to Him.” Standing at the head of each of these aisles, all the way across the front, will be a man of God to welcome you when you come. And, if you’re in the balcony, there’ll be someone standing under the banner in that corner to my right that says, “Redeemer”—that corner to my left that says, “Messiah”—to welcome those of you who’ll be coming from the balcony.

“Well, Pastor, what do—what do—I say when I do that?” Just say, “I’m trusting Jesus.” “What will happen?” We’ll rejoice, give you some scripture to stand on, answer any questions we can answer, and seal it in prayer. It’ll take just a moment. It’ll be one of the greatest things you’ve ever done. If I could do it for you, I would, but I can’t.

Now, you say, “Pastor, I still don’t understand, though. There are some questions I have.” We have open Bibles. You might just come and say, “I want to be saved, but I still have questions.” We’ll take a Bible and guide you in this. But, you come. Don’t worry about, really, what you’re going to say or how you’re going to say it. That’s not the important thing. You come and let us rejoice with you and seal this with you in prayer.

Now, there are others of you—others of you who are saved, and you know that you're saved, but you need a church home. I want to invite you just to lead the way for these who will be coming, acknowledging Christ. You be the first ones down here. And, if you know you're saved, you come and say, "I want to place my membership here," and we'll tell you how you may become a member of this wonderful fellowship—this family of friends.

Now, I want us to be in a spirit of prayer. Respectfully, I'm going to ask that no one leave during the invitation unless it is an emergency. And, if you can, pray for those round about you. If you're with a friend who needs to make a decision, you may volunteer to come forward with your friend. How beautiful that is!

Let's pray together. Now, Holy Father, in the quietness of this moment, I just pray that you'll help many in this building today to say an everlasting "yes" to Jesus. In His precious name we pray. Amen.

Let's stand together. You step out and come on the very first stanza. Step out right now and come.

Dads Who Shoot Straight

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 19, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 127

“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.”

PSALMS 127:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Warrior Must Be Skilled and Strong
- II. The Twig Must Be Shaped and Sharpened
 - A. Begin Early
 - B. Be Creative
 - C. Work for Character
 - D. Set Limits
 - E. Assign Responsibility
 - F. Learn to Be Fun
 - G. Let Your Kids See God at Work
- III. The Bow Must Be Strung and Bent
- IV. Your Aim Must Be True and Clear
- V. The Arrow Must Be Released and Sent

Conclusion

Introduction

Find in God's Word please Psalm 127. You have a Bible. It's right almost in the middle of the Bible. If you didn't bring one with you, there may be one there in the bookrack in front of you. And, find this Psalm—Psalm 127. Almost any body who has health and virility can father a child. You don't need to be very special to do that, but to be a daddy—and a good dad—you have to be special. I want to speak to you today on this subject: “Dads Who Shoot Straight.”

I want to read a Psalm—Psalm 127: *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep”*—now, notice, especially, these last three verses—*“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward”*—now, note, especially, verse 4—*“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of [their] youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: [for] they shall not be*

ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:1–5).

Notice now, especially, verse 4: *“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth”* (Psalm 127:4)—“Dads Who Shoot Straight.” According to verse 4, kids are like arrows, and the dad is like a mighty warrior. He is God’s archer; and when the dad’s aiming straight, the kids will hit the mark. Now, the arrow is no more effective than the archer. The bow is no better than the warrior who holds it. So, I want to speak to you dads and tell you what God’s Word has to say about hitting the mark with your kids—“Dads Who Shoot Straight.” How to be a mighty man—that’s what he’s talking about. Look at it: *“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children of [one’s] youth”* (Psalm 127:4).

When I was in college, I had completed most of my core curriculum. My main goal was to get that diploma and run, and I had a few extra courses that I could take called “electives.” And, I was carrying a heavy load and pastoring a little church; and so, I thought to myself, “Self, see if you can find the easiest course there and take it.” And so, I looked down, and I saw one in the Physical Education Department. And, I fancied myself as being an athlete, and I looked down there. And, it said, “Teaching Individual Sports.” I said, “That sounds like a lot of fun,” and it had things like badminton and archery, and golf, and tennis. I said, “I like that,” so I signed up for that. And, I said, “This is going to be fun, and I’m going to get college credit for it.” And so, I left the area where I’d been working, and I walked over—Brother Jim, you may remember where the Physical Education Department was—and I walked over to that area and just sauntered out, ready to take the first class. And, I saw a lady come toward me. She had white tennis shoes. They were white-white. She had white shorts and a white shirt—white-white. And, she was very trim and very proper. So, I figured she looked like she was into this culture and this physical education, and I said to her—now remember, I had come on a football scholarship to the school, and I thought I was cool—and I said to her... I said, “Is this the Phys. Ed. Department?” That was a mistake. She said to me, “Phys. Ed.? That sounds like a medicine.” She said, “This is the Physical Education Department.” And, from there on out was downhill.

She had me figured out from the get-go. She knew that I’d come over there just to take it easy, and it so happened that she and some others happened to be my instructor. And, we were learning to teach individual sports. And, one of the first things that we had to learn to teach was archery. Now, you know, I know a lot about archery, because when I was five, I had a bow and arrow with a little plunger on the end that would stick on the glass. Friend, I have never been made such a fool of in my life or since but when I got that incredibly big bow. And, I know they gave me one with the hardest pull because I thought I was a strong man. And, they said, “All right. There’s the target. Put that arrow in there and pull it back.” And, I couldn’t even pull the thing back.

It was... I know they gave me one that Samson used to use. And, that arrow just went *pffff* like that and fell on the ground. And, I realized that being an archer takes strength. It takes skill. It takes practice to be a good archer. It takes a mighty man.

I got out a book—a Bible dictionary—this past week or several weeks ago, and I began to read about archery—in Bible times, what archers were like. And, I found out that a good archer in Bible times could pull a 100-pound bow. That means that's the strength that it takes to pull that bow. And, here's something that amazed me: an archer, in Bible times, could shoot an arrow between 300 and 400 yards. Can you imagine sending an arrow that far? And, it took a mighty man to do it. Now, the Bible says, *"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are [the] children of [one's] youth"* (Psalm 127:4).

I want you fathers to listen to me today and see if we can learn something about dads who shoot straight. Let me give you some principles.

I. The Warrior Must Be Skilled and Strong

First of all, if you would shoot straight, the warrior—that's you, dad—the warrior must be skilled and strong. You cannot be a good dad without developing your spiritual, emotional, mental strength. You must be skilled, and you must be strong.

Now, I know there are many reasons why the arrow may miss the mark; and if your children fail, it will not be altogether your fault, necessarily. I mean, you can take aim, and a sudden wind can come. You may be a good warrior and have a defective arrow with a hidden weakness that you don't know anything about. And, if you have kids that have gone wrong, I want to remind you that Almighty God had some in the Garden of Eden, and they failed. And, I want people today to be incriminated because of a child who may have failed, but I want to say this: most of the time—most of the time, most of the time—if the child fails, it's because of the warrior who has not pulled the bow, released the arrow with a good aim.

We, as dads, have awesome power. The power of the father—the power of the warrior—has far more to do with where the arrow goes than the arrow has of itself. Your responsibility as a dad is to develop your skills to shape, to sharpen, and shoot young arrows at the enemy. Do you know the ambition of the man named Adrian is? My ambition is, first of all, to be a good Christian; secondly, to be a good husband; thirdly, to be a good dad; fourth, to be a good preacher and a pastor. That's my hierarchy of values: first, to be a Christian; secondly, to be a good husband; thirdly, to be a good dad; and fourthly, to be a good pastor. Now, I don't minimize these, but I do have a hierarchy of values. And so, put it down: The warrior must be skilled and strong.

II. The Twig Must Be Shaped and Sharpened

Number two: The twig must be shaped and sharpened. Children are not born arrows; they are born crooked sticks. They have to be made into arrows. *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray [speaking lies] as soon as [they’re] born”* (Psalm 58:3). Now, you cannot shoot well with crooked arrows. You’ve got to season them. You’ve got to shape them. You’ve got to sharpen them. You have got to shoot them after you’ve done that. And, that is your responsibility, Dad—to make arrows out of twigs and sticks. The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4: you’re to *“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 4:6).

Do you know the measure of a dad? Do you know how you measure a dad? Measure a dad in the emotional and spiritual health of his family. Look at the kids, and you’ll find out what kind of dad he most likely is. Your kids, like arrows, are to be sharp. They’re to be straight; they’re to be strong, and they’re to be balanced. That’s what it takes for an arrow to be an arrow: it’s got to be straight; it’s got to be sharp; it’s got to be strong; it must be balanced.

Now, the problem with many dads today is this: we want to hand our kids over to professionals. We think if we make a good living—bring home the bacon, as it were—then we can afford the very best for our kids. And, in trying to give our kids the best, we give the second best.

For example, no longer today do dads have to be storytellers—to sit up late at night and read to the child, as we saw displayed here, from the Bible, or “Jack and the Beanstalk,” or whatever. We have a professional storyteller; it’s called a television. It never gets tired. It never becomes impatient. And, if you, as a dad, can just spend a little more hours working, you can buy your child a bigger television.

No longer today do we need to sit down and teach our children ourselves; we can, today, if we’re successful enough, have a professional educator. And, he can have our children from 8:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon, and he can teach our children all about sex and the birds and the bees while you’re out there accumulating things.

You can get a professional to do your lawn for you—no need for him to go outside and do the lawn like you used to do. Now, you can pay somebody to do that while you accumulate more things.

And, when it’s time for him to learn how to play baseball, as we saw described here in that tableau, you don’t need to do that. Why, sir, you just stay at the job. There are plenty of professionals who will teach your child how to play baseball. And, if you work hard enough, think of all the good equipment that you can buy for him! If he needs to learn how to swim, you don’t have to take your time there at the beach, or at the lake, or at the pool. Why, if you work enough, sir, and spend enough hours, why, you can buy membership to the country club, and somebody over there will teach him how to swim.

And, you won't have to do that. Maybe, even if you're successful enough, you can buy him a swimming pool.

And, when he needs guidance and answers—why, listen; if you're successful enough, sir—you can have a professional guidance counselor who will even sit down with him and say, “These are your skills; that ought to be your future.” Aren't you blessed to tell your son what he's good at and what he can be when he grows up? Why, you can even get somebody to teach him how to drive! You won't have to do that any more. If you'll stay at your job enough and work hard enough, why, you might even buy him a new car. You won't even have to teach him how to get out there and get his hands greasy cleaning spark plugs and changing the oil filter. But, everything in us tells us that real dads are better than amateur dads or professional dads. Is that not true? Friend, with all of our hearts, we know that it is true.

Let me give you seven rules for making arrows out of sticks.

A. **Begin Early**

First of all, sir, you begin early. Look at our verse: “*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth*”—“*the children of the youth*” (Psalm 127:4). The Bible says, “*Train up a child in the way [that] he [shall] go*” (Proverbs 22:6). Now, if you want to make arrows out of sticks and twigs, start when they are young, because when a child is young, the curiosity factor is high. When a child is young, the memory factor is high. When a child is young, the trust factor is high. When a child is young, the humility factor is high. A child can be molded and shaped when he or she is young, and tomorrow that toddler will not be asking, “Why?” Tomorrow, that schoolboy will not want you to help you with his lessons. Begin early.

B. **Be Creative**

Number two: Be creative. I love Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 6 and 7. It speaks of dads training children, and this is what it says—and it is to the dad: “*And these words, which I command [you] this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children*”—now, listen to how you do it—“*and [thou] shalt talk of them*”—“*talk of them*”—“*when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up*” (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). Now, what does that mean? It means that teaching the Bible ought to be as normal as eating, and breathing, and talking, and sitting, and rising. So many of us have the idea that Bible instruction is, “You sit still while I instill.” And, somehow it's like cod liver oil—a dose a day keeps the devil away. And, we're just trying to ram it down their throats. Be creative.

C. **Work for Character**

Number three: Work for character in your child. Now, I want to just pause here for a

moment and say there is a need in America today—whether you look in the White House, in the Congress, or in the world of sports, what is the need today? It is integrity and character. Is that not right? Integrity. Now, our culture puts an emphasis upon sports, and grades, and health, and popularity, and possessions, but you, as a dad—you must you must make your arrow straight, and that is integrity.

Let me just rattle off some character qualities; I want you to listen to them: contentment, courage, courtesy, discernment, fairness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, humility, kindness, obedience, orderliness, patience, persistence, self-control, tactfulness, thankfulness, thriftiness, wisdom. Those are the things that you are to be putting into your child to make him a straight arrow. That's character. And, when you compliment your child, when you affirm your child, don't affirm him for his natural abilities, primarily—for his strength or athletic ability. Oh, yes—remember that. But, compliment him for his character. Say, "Thank you, Son, for your courtesy. Son, I was amazed at your humility. That's wonderful. Oh, John, your honesty in that thing—that was good, John." You see, those are things that he can acquire; those are things he can attain. Begin early. Be creative. Work for character.

D. Set Limits

And, set limits—set limits. Today, dads are not setting limits. First Samuel chapter 3, verse 13: God said, concerning a man who was a man of God and yet he failed, *"For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the inequity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not"* (1 Samuel 3:13). Dad, you are to set limits. Your child needs some goals, and he needs some limitations. When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve some limitations as well as some blessings. When you set goals and when you set limits, they will be tested by the child. The child will push against them to see if they give; and when he pushes against those limits, if you do not hold firm, your child will lose a sense of security. He'll have no security, and no limitations on the child implies to the child that the child has been rejected. And, I'm going to tell you something, and you listen to me: if you do not conquer your child, somebody else will—somebody else will. Set limits.

E. Assign Responsibility

Next, assign responsibility. The Bible says, "We're to train a child" (Proverbs 22:6). That means to give them training; it means to drill them. You've given them too many freebies. If you want to see what your children can do, stop giving them things. Teach your child that there's a link between effort and reward. Give them an allowance and teach them how to spend, and how to save, and how to give. Have you set limits?

F. Learn to Be Fun

Next, learn to be fun—learn to be fun. Proverbs chapter 17, verse 22 says, *"A merry*

heart [does] good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). If your home does not ring with laughter, you’re headed for trouble. Let your house be a happy place. Mankind is the only creature that can laugh, weep, or blush. The other creatures don’t do that. Why? Because we are made in the image of God. Let your children see you laugh. Let them see you laugh at yourself. Let them see you laugh in hard times. The Bible says in Proverbs 15: *“All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast”* (Proverbs 15:15). You can laugh in the midst of adversity. Thackeray said, “A good laugh is sunshine in the house.” In our home, people think, you know, if you’re part of a preacher’s home, they must wake up every morning, sing the doxology, put on black clothes. I mean, people really think that. You just have to be in our house to know uproariously funny things are so much of the time.

When our children were smaller, we got in the automobile one day to go somewhere. And, my son, sitting in the back, David, had let down the rear window; and so, I turned on the air conditioning, and I said, “Son, put the window up.” And, he put the window up, and we started out. After a while, I heard this noise roaring in the car; it was wind coming through. And, I looked around, and the window was back down. I said, “Son, put the window back up.” He did. After a while, I hear this roaring noise again. I look over there, and the window is down again. This time, I was very peeved. (That’s a spiritual way of putting it.) And, I said, “Son, put that window up, and leave it up, or you’re in serious trouble. Do you understand that?” It got very quiet in the car. He said, “Yes, sir,” and the window went up. And then, a lot of mischievousness came over me, and we’re driving along. And, I reach over on the control side, and I let the window down by where he was. I wish you could have heard what Joyce said. Joyce turned around, and she said, “David!” like it was going to be the end of the world. And, when she realized what happened and he realized what happened, we had a big laugh. It was just a lot of fun in a tense situation. Learn to be firm, to be fair, but to have fun.

G. Let Your Kids See God at Work

And, let your kids see God at work. I cannot tell you how important this is. Your kids need to see God at work in the home. You see, it’s so very important what you do. They watch. Now, if you tithe, they know that God is more important than money. If you are in church on Sunday morning, what does that say to them? God is important. Worship is important. I’m speaking to some dads right now: you’re at home watching this program when you ought to be in church. This is not meant to be a substitute for church. Do you know what you’re saying to your kids? “Going to church is not all that important.” You’re teaching them a lesson. Let them see God at work in your life.

We had gone to Florida for a vacation. A friend had loaned me an exquisitely beautiful motor home—I mean, a big, nice piece of machinery, like a yacht. Boy, it’s so beautiful. And, I said, “Family, we’re going to have a great, great vacation!” And, we put

our kids in that motor home and went down to Florida, and we were parked at Satellite Beach there on the east coast of Florida. And, I wanted to go on that Sunday morning to my friend's church in Titusville, where Peter Lord is pastor. And so, we went from Satellite Beach across the way up around to Titusville, and went to that church, and had a wonderful worship service, and came back. And, when I got out of that borrowed motor home, I looked, and one of the hubcaps from one of the rear wheels was missing. Now, that hubcap is about that big. I'm serious. It's one of those big things—covers the whole wheel, covered with chrome, spokes. I mean, this was no ordinary motor home. It was a nice piece of machinery, and it looked like somebody with a tooth missing. "Oh, no! This thing is borrowed. I've lost a hubcap. Where could the thing be?" I said to my boys, "Boys"—and I had my boys there. I said—look here. We've lost a hubcap. We lost it going to church. I believe that it was on when we got in this thing. Now, it's about a 30-mile trip from where we were to the church." I said, "Where do you think it could be? Do you think maybe if we just re-drove the thing that we could see it by the side of the road?" I said, "Let's do it."

We got that motor home, and we began to re-drive that trip. And then, I mean, just out in the boondocks, we stopped. And, I said, "Well, let's just get out in this place and just walk up and down the highway. I mean, I'm just a strip out of 30 miles, Scotty." I mean, just arbitrarily stopping—and the boys went down that way, and I stopped. Oh, let me tell you this; this is the important part: I said, "Boys, let's pray and ask God to help us to find that hubcap." So, I got my sons together, and we prayed. You know, I thought, "Maybe you ought not to pray like that, because if you don't find it, you know, you...you're just teaching them God doesn't answer prayer, or whatever." But, I just felt impressed to pray, and I said, "Let's pray that we'll find that hubcap." And, the boys went off, and I stopped. And, this is the prayer I prayed: I said, "O God, I've told those boys that You answer prayer, and we prayed—not because of the hubcap, but because they can see an answer to prayer. Help me to find that hubcap."

Now folks, I walked from the highway about forty yards or more off the highway at a place where I'd stopped randomly, arbitrarily, and I look down in a ditch; and in that ditch, under about that much of water, was that hubcap. I mean, I just walked to it. It was the most incredible thing. I'm talking about thirty miles. I get out, and I walk right to it. And, there it was. I said, "Boys, come get this thing, and let's go." Amen? I wish I could say God does something like that all the time, but He does it enough to let me know there's a God in the heavens. And, I want my boys to see God work in my life.

We had a man that worked here on this church staff, Matt McVay, a dear man of God who came as an older man called into the ministry. He's now a pastor in Austin, Texas. Mac had told his boys, "If the Braves ever get into the World Series, boys, we're going to see the Braves play—I don't care what it costs." Not a wealthy man—but it's

just one of those things. They'd been rabid Atlanta Braves fans. And, the Braves, you remember, not long ago, got in the Series. And, Mac called his sons and said, "Boys, we're going"—these are grown boys now—"We're going. We're going to go over there, and we're going to see the Braves play." He was naïve, because he didn't have tickets. But, he said, "I promised since you were kids." And so, he got his family, and they flew. "It's going to be the biggest thing—I mean, this is it!" And so, he got his family, and they flew. "It's going to be the biggest thing—I mean, this is it! This is the pinnacle. We're going to see as a family. We're going to the World Series to see our team, the Braves, play baseball." They knew that they could buy some tickets. Oh, yes—people were marking them up very high, but, "This is it! I mean, we're going to pay. Price is not the primary thing." But, when they got over there, they began to read the paper that it is against the law for any body to sell a ticket for more than they paid for it. It's called what? Scalping—scalping. You talk about a moral dilemma! They'd already rented their hotel. They'd already come. And, while they were willing to pay more for a ticket...

Then, they thought, "But, well, wait a minute. The law says it's against the law to sell one; it doesn't say it's against the law to buy one." And so, they say, "Well, we wouldn't be breaking the law." They would be breaking the law. And, they talked about it, and God the Holy Spirit said, "You know better than that. You know that you're just playing with words. If it's wrong to sell it, it's wrong to buy it." And, this dad explained this to his sons like a good dad should, and they said, "Well, what we gonna do?" They said, "Well, let's just stand out here on a parking lot and see if somebody will sell us a ticket to the World Series at the regular price." People thought, "You got to be kidding!"

They were all in the stadium, and there's McVay with his family, just standing there, when a man walks up and says, "What are you folks doing out here?" Said, "We're trying to get in the game, but we can't get any tickets." He said, "This is a nice family. I'd like you to be my guests, if you would." This was a man high up in the Braves organization. He said, "You come with me." He took that family to where the high muckety-mucks sit, ushered them in, began to laden them down with souvenirs and programs and introduce them to all the moguls. There they were a sittin' in the kingdom while all the rest of those peons were down there. They thought, "This is incredible! Who could believe it?" And, when they got back the motel, the manager of the motel came out and said, "Sir, I owe you an apology. We haven't cleaned your room yet, and it's in the afternoon. Please forgive us, and there'll be no cost for your room." Isn't that neat? Isn't that neat? Here's a dad who says to his boys, "Boys, there is integrity. We're not going to pay the extra price for those tickets."

I love it when God does something like that. Don't you? I mean, we need to give our boys a chance to see God at work. Let them see God at work. Do that friend. The arrows must be sharpened. The must be formed.

III. The Bow Must Be Strung and Bent

Here's a third thing: Not only must the warrior be skilled and strong, and not only must the arrows be shaped and sharpened, but thirdly, the bow—the bow—must be strung and bent. You see, neither the arrow nor the warrior is good without the bow, and it's the bow that sends the arrow forward. What is that bow? It is prayer. There's where the power comes in. Joyce and I make it a habit, as we've already done this morning, to hold hands and call the names of our children and our grandchildren before God in prayer. A dad without prayer is like an archer with an unstrung bow. Never waver. Keep on praying. That's where the power is. That's what sends your arrows out forth with power. I wish I had more time, but I am running out of time. Let me very quickly move to the last two things.

IV. Your Aim Must Be True and Clear

Your aim—your aim—must be true and clear. I appreciated that scripture that the young man spoke this morning from 3 John 1: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in [the] truth”* (3 John 1:4). Have you got goals for your children? What are the goals for your children? To be wealthy, to be healthy, to be happy—those are not the goals for my children. I would be pleased if they had enough, if they're healthy and happy. But, my goal for my children is that they will be right in the center of the will of God—that they will be in the center of the will of God. You know, what good is a bow, what good are straight arrows, if there's no goal, if there's no aim?

Now, your responsibility as a dad is to point your children to the will of God. Goals are so very important. Social scientists have discovered that 95% of people have never written down any goals, but of the 5% that have, 95% of them have achieved them. Isn't that interesting? As a matter of fact, in Yale University, in 1953, a social scientist found out that 3% of the students at Yale in 1953 had written down specific goals. They came back later in 1975, and they found out that the 3% who had written goals had achieved more than the other 97% put together—put together. What good is it to be an archer if you shoot an arrow and where it fell I know not where? Do you have a God-given goal for your children? Not your goals, God's goal—God's aim.

V. The Arrow Must Be Released and Sent

Last of all—last of all—the arrow must be released and sent. Arrows are not to be collected; they are to be projected. Our goal is to produce kids who can emotionally leave home—kids who will love somebody else in a different way and in a different way than they even love their own parents. And friend, it's often hard to let go of the arrows, isn't it? Boy, I tell you, when your girls get married, it's like giving a Stradivarius violin to a chimpanzee. You gotta let go.

Being a mother is a lot like teaching a child to ride a bicycle. You have to know when to hold on and when to let go. And, if you lack the courage to let go, you're going to get very tired of running along the side. There is a time when you just let them go. But, if you've done what you ought to do, the letting go can be such a wonderful thing.

We shot an arrow all the way across the ocean. Our son, David, was leaving as a youngster with Operation Mobilization to go to Austria. The morning before he left as a youngster, the family gathered to pray for him and to give him blessings. And, David got out his guitar that morning, and he sang a song that he'd written that morning. He sang it to his family, and this is what he sang to us:

*Now the time has come when I must finally say, "Goodbye."
You know it breaks my heart to see the sadness in your eyes.
But, soon the time will come when even time will be no more,
And all of us will join to sing our praises to the Lord.
You know I hate to go, but then again I feel the call
To go and tell the world about the Savior of us all.
The harvest is so ripe and the workers are so few.
I guess to go and tell them is the least that I can do.
So, please remember me when you kneel down to pray.
Remember I will think of you through each and every day.
And, now that I've said all of this, I've only one thing more:
I love you more than anything in all this great big world.*

—DAVID ROGERS

Well, friend, you can let an arrow go when you know that that arrow is aimed at the enemy. That's what it's all about.

Conclusion

"As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children of [one's] youth" (Psalm 127:4). If you're a young dad, get to work shaping, sharpening, and seasoning your arrows. Sharpen your own skills as a father warrior, determine godly goals, and if you say, "I heard this message 20 years too late," ask God to help you find and recover some lost arrows. Ask God to give you another opportunity. What a responsibility is ours! Dads, will you pray, "God, make me a mighty man, a dad whose kids hit the mark"?

Let's pray. Father God, seal the message to our hearts, and give us today some dads who shoot straight. And Lord, give us some kids today who are sharp arrows. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dads Who Shoot Straight

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 20, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 127

“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.”

PSALMS 127:4–5

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Archer Must Be Strong
 - II. The Arrows Must Be Straight
 - A. Begin Early
 - 1. The Curiosity Factor Is High
 - 2. The Memory Factor Is High
 - 3. The Trust Factor Is High
 - 4. The Humility Factor Is High
 - B. Be Creative
 - C. Work to Build Character
 - D. Learn to Set Limits
 - E. Assign Responsibilities
 - F. Let Your Home Be Filled with Laughter
 - G. Let Your Kids See God at Work in Your Family
 - H. Cover Your Kids Constantly with Prayer
 - III. The Aim Must Be Sure
- Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding the Book of Psalms, please, and open your Bibles to Psalm 127. If you did not bring a Bible with you this morning, most likely there's one in the pew rack there before you. And, find Psalm 127; and as you're finding it, may I tell you what you probably already know?—that Satan has unleashed an all-out war on the family. When I say, “the family,” I'm talking about the institution of families, and I'm talking about your family, specifically.

Now, if you don't believe that there is a war on the family, I want you to listen to what Gloria Steinem has said. Do you know who Gloria Steinem is? A former Playboy bunny who was one of the chief spokespersons for the feminist movement. She is recognized by feminists as being a leader. I want you to listen to what she says, and I'm going to

give you a quotation: “Marriage has existed for the benefit of men and is a legalized, sanctioned control of women. The end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women.” She says, “Let’s just do away with marriage.” And then, she goes on to say, “It is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands. We must work to destroy marriage. The nuclear family must be replaced with a new form of family, where individuals live together to meet the need of all people. There must come a new way of looking at children. Children must be seen as the responsibility of the entire society rather than their parents”—just another way of saying, “It takes a village”; just another way of saying that marriage, as we know it, is obsolete. Now, that would be laughable, and no one would pay any attention to that, except to say that this particular woman has a large following. And, there are many who see her as the patron saint of a new movement in our world.

Now, of course, that’s a very frontal attack. Most of the attack on the family is subtler. For example, the sitcoms of today—what do they do? They satirize or ridicule the nuclear family. They mock marriage, and devoted fathers and mothers are looked upon, somehow, as dinosaurs. And, the father, in these sitcoms, is a bumbling, fumbling, stumbling buffoon. And, dads are mocked and ridiculed. Or, if it is a serious film, the father is seen as cruel, vindictive, overbearing. And, if he is a religious man, look out! He’s one who is twisted and perverted in cruel ways. And then, on top of that, there are many who would not fall into either of these two categories but have never found—never found—God’s plan.

J. Paul Getty—is that name familiar to you? J. Paul Getty was one—in his day—one of the richest men on the face of the earth. As a matter of fact, when a billion dollars was worth more than a billion dollars is today, he had a net worth that exceeded four billion dollars. Now, if you have a net worth of more than four billion dollars, most of the people of this world would say that you are a success. And yet, he wrote his autobiography, and it was recorded in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1981. I want you to see what this man said. This is J. Paul Getty. He said, and I quote. Now, here’s a man—here’s a man—with more than four billion—four billion; not million, billion. “B” as in baby. Four billion dollars. He said, and I quote: “I’ve never been given to envy, save”—or, “except for”—“the envy I feel toward those people who have the ability to make a marriage work and endure happily. It’s an art I have never been able to master. My record—five marriages, five divorces. In short, five failures.” And then, the article continues: “He termed the memories of his relationship with his five sons as ‘painful.’ Much of this pain has been passed on with his money. His most treasured offspring, Timothy, a frail child, born when Getty was 53, died in 1958 at the age of 12 of surgical complications after a sickly life spent mostly separated from his father, who was forever away on business. Other members of the Getty family also suffered from tragic

circumstances. A grandson, J. Paul Getty, III, was kidnapped and held for a ransom of 2.9 million. When Getty refused to pay, they held the boy for five months and, eventually, cut off his right ear. Getty's oldest son apparently committed suicide among strange circumstances. Another son, Gordon Paul Getty, has been described as living a tortured existence. He was ridiculed in correspondence by his father and was the least favorite son. Similar sorrow has followed other members of this unfortunate family." Here's a man that the world would call a success; and yet, he, himself, confessed, "I have been an abject failure in the things that really matter."

I've just mentioned all three of these illustrations to show you that the devil has done a good job on families. And, when we're talking about families today, I cannot—I cannot—overestimate the importance of fathers. I heard a song, Brother Jim. I don't know who wrote the song. I really don't know the title of the song, and I'm not sure I have the phrase just right. But, here's what I remember: the man is singing to God, and here's what he's saying: "God, I want to be just like You / [because] he"—talking about his son—"wants to be just like me" (Phillips Craig & Dean). Are you familiar with that song? Yeah, you know. Okay. He knows everything. Jim knows everything. "[Father,] I want to be just like you / [because that boy] wants to be just like me" (Phillips Craig & Dean). There's a tremendous amount of truth in that.

Now, let's look in God's Word in Psalm 127 and see what God says about all of this. He says, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it*"—do you know, J. Paul Getty said, "I've never been able to master that art." Of course not! No matter how much he tries, without God, it cannot be done—"*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows*"—four billion dollars, and you know what it was? The bread of sorrows—the bread of sorrows—"*for so he giveth his beloved sleep*"—and then, he says this—"*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate*" (Psalm 127:1–5). Now, what he is saying is this—that children are like arrows and dads are like archers. Dads are to be mighty warriors, and children are to be arrows in the hand of the father. And, the implication of this psalm is that when dads learn to shoot straight, the kids are going to hit the mark—when dads learn to shoot straight, the kids are going to hit the mark. You see, an arrow is no more effective than the warrior who shoots it, and the bow is not much better than the man that holds that bow in his hand.

Now, with that as a background, we're going to talk about dads who shoot straight and kids who hit the mark, this morning. Now, three things I would have you to learn

today as we look into this passage of Scripture.

I. The Archer Must Be Strong

Number one: If you would to have a successful family and good kids, the archer must be strong—the archer must be strong. Notice what it says, “*As arrows are in the hand of a*”—what?—“*a mighty man*” (Psalm 127:4). We saw that beautiful vignette, “Men of Strength, the Silent Strength,” and that’s the truth. We are to be strong.

Now, when I was in the university, I took a course in teaching individual sports, and I was initiated to the sport of archery. It wasn’t what I thought it was going to be. There’s more than casually picking up a bow and an arrow. I learned—I learned—that no matter how fine the arrow and how strong the bow, it takes an incredible amount of skill. There must be good aim. There must be a full draw. And, there’s got to be a smooth release to make that arrow go where you want it to be. Needless to say, it takes skill. It takes practice. It takes determination. The same is true to be a good dad; the same is true of fatherhood. Now folks, I want to tell you, to be a good man is difficult; to be a good husband is more difficult, but to be a good father is the most difficult of all. Did you know that? It really is. It is difficult to be.

Now, when the arrow misses its target, there may be many reasons. Indeed, there may be some bad arrows. Indeed, there may be some moving targets. Indeed, there may be some unforeseen wind that blows the arrow away from the target. Now, because of this, this does not diminish the warrior’s responsibility. It really only increases it, that we might reshoot with skill, point those arrows. God has given us these children like arrows. What is my responsibility as a dad? My responsibility is to shape, to sharpen, and to shoot those arrows at the enemy. “*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are [the] children of [one’s] youth*” (Psalm 127:4).

Now, do you know what my goal in life is? You say, “To be a good pastor.” Well, I want to be a good pastor. “To be a good preacher?” I hope I can be a good preacher. But, my highest ambition—and God is listening—is not to be, primarily, a good pastor or a good preacher; it’s to be a good husband and a good father. And, I don’t mind telling you, if I had to choose between you and my family, I’d choose my family—I would. That doesn’t mean that I don’t love the Church. You’ll have a better pastor if I love my family as I ought to love my family. You can get another pastor. My kids—they’ve got one dad. I am their daddy. And, as a matter of fact, the Bible says that if a man doesn’t practice it at home, he ought not to export it. (1Timothy 3:4)

He, first of all, a pastor ought to be one who has his family under the tutelage and the spiritual leadership of himself. So, here’s the first point—now, listen very carefully: the archer must be strong—the archer must be strong. “*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man*” (Psalm 127:4). Now, we’re not talking about physical strength here,

because some of us could not qualify, but we're talking about spiritual strength. And, any can qualify, because he's talking now in spiritual terms.

II. The Arrows Must Be Straight

Now, here's the second thing: not only must the archer be strong—the arrows must be straight. That's the second point: the arrows must be straight. You see, there it says the archer must be straight, but it says—should say—the arrows must be straight. Now children, listen—children are not born straight arrows. Sticks are not arrows; twigs are not arrows. Children are not, by nature, arrows; they have to be made into arrows. And, you cannot shoot straight with crooked arrows. And so, what is your job as a dad? It is shaping, it is sharpening, and it is shooting the arrows that God has put in your hand. And, that is, I suppose, among life's most difficult tasks, and that's the reason we have so many dropout dads. The problem in society is not, primarily, juvenile delinquency, but it is the delinquency of dads—dropout dads who fail to do and be what they ought to be.

Put these verses down in your margin. Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4: *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and [the] admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). The word *nurture* literally means the “discipline,” and the *admonition* means the “teaching of the Lord.” Or, again, put this verse down—Colossians chapter 3 and verse 21: *“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged”* (Colossians 3:21). Do you know what the challenge of any man is—and one of the prime marks of success of any man? Not how much money he can accumulate, but whether or not his kids are spiritually sharp and emotionally straight. Are his kids spiritually sharp and are they emotionally straight? An arrow has to be straight, and it has to be sharp.

Now, notice what it says: *“As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man”* (Psalm 127:4). There is a time, dads, when the arrows are in your hand, and there will come a time when they will be out of your hand. Now, when the arrow is in your hand, you have a responsibility. So many of us want to give that responsibility over to professionals today. “Somebody else can handle the job for us,” we feel. Someone has written these words, and I want you to listen to them because they're very pertinent: “no longer does he need to sit in your big easy chair and listen while you read ‘Jack and the Beanstalk.’ Now there is a professional storyteller called ‘television.’ It doesn't doze off or become impatient. You can work those few extra hours in the office, earning a little more money, so your children can have a bigger television. You can now put him in the hands of a professional educator who will have him from 8:00 a.m. in the morning until 3:00 p.m., five days a week. He can tell him about the birds and the bees, and he will get his sex education there. You will have more time to accumulate things. You can work a few

more hours and pay a professional to mow the lawn and to wash your car. Your child will not have to learn discipline and responsibility. A professional can teach him how to play baseball, and you won't have to stand with him in the driveway at dusk and show him how to hold a bat or to throw a curve ball. No, if you work a few extra hours you can buy him a real hardwood bat."

"A professional can teach him how to swim so you won't have to waste your weekends at the beach or lake, and with your extra money you can be on the golf course. You may even provide him with a swimming pool to swim in at home or at the club. And, when he gets into high school, you will be able to afford a professional guidance counselor who will give him ideas about his future. Your extra money will pay for that. A professional can teach him how to drive, and with your extra money you can buy him a new car. No need for you to get your hands greasy, side by side in the garage while you teach him how to clean the plugs and change the oil filter." Friend, everything in us tells us there's something wrong with that. Amen? Kids need dads, and there's no way that you can pay somebody else to do what God wants you to do.

Now, how do you shape and sharpen arrows? Get out a pencil and a piece of paper, and I want you to write some things down.

A. **Begin Early**

Number one: Begin early. Now, when you have a twig, then you can begin to shape it when it's soft and pliable. That's the reason the Bible says in Proverbs 22 and verse 6: *"Train up a"—what?—"a child"—"Train up a child in the way [that] he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6). Little children can be shaped and molded so very easy. You want me to tell you why?

1. The Curiosity Factor Is High

Number one: The curiosity factor is very, very high. "Why, Daddy? Why?"—"Why, Daddy? Why?" Friend, that's a teaching moment. Don't say, "Stop asking, 'Why?'" Say, "Keep asking, 'Why?'" And, answer those questions—the little ones and the big ones.

2. The Memory Factor Is High

The memory factor is great. Don't tell me that little children can't memorize. Friend, by the time they're two, they've learned a foreign language. Think about it.

3. The Trust Factor Is High

The trust factor is at the highest point. Little children trust. That's the reason the Bible says that adults have to become like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3).

4. The Humility Factor Is High

The humility factor is at an all-time high. Little children are not too proud to learn they can take advice, and they have an innate ability to believe. That's the reason why you

must start soon. Tomorrow that child will not be asking, “Why?” and that schoolboy will not need help with his lessons. So, number one: Start early.

B. Be Creative

Number two: Be creative. I can’t stress this enough. When God told the Jews how to train their children—and, by and large, the Jews have done a great job at this—He told them in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 6 and 7: *“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart”*—not just in your head, but in thine heart—*“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them”*—I love that; just underscore that—*“shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up”*

(Deuteronomy 6:6–7). Do you see it? It’s in your heart, and it’s just bubbling out. And, there are all kinds of ways to teach. Don’t ram it down their throat like cod liver oil.

Family worship doesn’t have to be an ordeal. Most of your teaching is not going to be done in family worship; it’s going to be done when you rise up, when you lie down, when you go out, when you come in. As you walk, as you talk, you’re going to be sharing the Lord.

C. Work to Build Character

Number three: Work to build character—work to build character. Do you know what most dads are working on? Sports, grades, health, popularity, management, but not character. What is character? Character is integrity. Let me give... I want to just rattle off some words, and don’t try to write them all down because I’m going to give too fast. But, I want you to be asking yourself this question as I rattle off these words: Who is teaching these things to my son, to my daughter? Are you ready? Contentment, courage, courtesy, discernment, fairness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, humility, kindness, obedience, orderliness, patience, persistence, self-control, tactfulness, thankfulness, thriftiness, wisdom, zeal. Where are they going to get that? You think they’re going to get it at school? No. Dad, you’ve got to build character. When you compliment your kids, compliment them for character qualities—not just for the home run, not just for the good grades, not just for how many pounds they can curl when they’re in the gymnasium, but compliment them for these character qualities.

D. Learn to Set Limits

Number four: Learn to set some limits on your child—set some limits. Let me give you a verse here. God told a man named Samuel, who was a great man, that God would judge him. *“For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not”*—“he

restrained them not" (1 Samuel 3:13). That is, he did not set some limits. You say, "Well, I don't want to set limits on my child." God had two children, put them in the Garden of Eden, and God set some limits upon them. Do you know that if you don't set limits on your children, it's a sign that you have rejected them? No limitation implies to a child rejection, and if you don't conquer them, they will allow somebody else to conquer them. When you set limits and don't just have a lot of little small rules, but have some great principles, and adhere to them, because that child will push against those... He'll push, and he'll push. That's in a child's nature. And, if, when he pushes, it gives, he will have no confidence; he'll have no security—none whatsoever. Every child needs some limits.

E. Assign Responsibilities

Next, assign responsibilities. Teach your child that one of the greatest abilities is responsibility. Give him regular work assignments. He doesn't need so many freebies. Most of you have no idea what your child can do because he's never been challenged to do it. Teach him that there's a link between success and work. And, make him complete the job, and don't fix it for him. Give him some money; give him an allowance, and then let him earn some. And, teach him money management. Teach him how to save and to give, and how to spend. Teach responsibility.

F. Let Your Home Be Filled with Laughter

Next—we're just talking about making arrows straight and sharp—let your home be filled with laughter. Your home ought to be the happiest place in the town. It ought to be the place where he wants to bring his friends there. Proverbs chapter 15, verse 13: "*A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*" (Proverbs 15:13). Have you ever seen kids with a broken spirit? They haven't been raised in a happy home. "*The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness. All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*" (Proverbs 15:14–15). I don't care how much wealth you have, how fine your home is—if there's not laughter in that home, your home is tragic. Thackeray said, "Laughter is like sunshine in the home." Your home ought to ring with laughter. If your home is a happy home, I can tell you, it has a much greater chance of survival.

G. Let Your Kids See God at Work in Your Family

Next, let your kids see God at work in your family—let them see God at work. Now, they hear Pastor Rogers preach about God, but the home—this is the classroom. The home is the laboratory. Let them see God at work.

And, do you know how they're going to see God at work in your house? Number

one: They're going to see God in your worship. They're going to watch you when company comes, whether you strayed from church—missed church. You say, "Well, Pastor, we weren't there Sunday. We had company to drop in." Tell your boss, tomorrow morning, "I didn't come to work. I had company to drop in." See how that goes. They're going to be watching—they're going to be watching your priorities in your worship.

They're going to be watching how you use your time. Let them see God as a vibrant reality in your life. Our kids know that we're not perfect, but our kids know that God is number one. And, I'm not afraid for you to ask any of the four. They'll tell you; they know. Now, what if somebody were to ask you, if I were to bring one of your children up here and ask them, "What is the priority of your dad?" what would they say? Let them see God at work in your home.

H. **Cover Your Kids Constantly with Prayer**

And then, cover them constantly with prayer. That's the last one I want to mention. Just cover them with prayer. Now, if you are the archer and the children are the arrows, the bow is prayer. That's what sends them forth. And, a father without prayer is like an archer with an unstrung bow. You need to pray for them. Pray for them regularly. Joyce and I pray together every day. And, we pray for our children and our grandchildren by name every day, as we have already done this morning, to lift them to the throne of God in prayer. And, our children know that, no matter where they are on the face of this Earth, that mom and dad are going to be covering them with their prayers. Pray for them. And, no matter how dark it gets, and how discouraging it may be, and how difficult it may seem, just keep on praying. Never, never, never stop praying. I've seen my darling wife pray our children through one circumstance after another after another after another. What am I saying? I'm saying, friend, that the archer must be strong, and the arrows must be straight.

III. **The Aim Must Be Sure**

Now, here's the third thing I want to say today: the aim must be sure. Now, if you've got a good archer and you've got a good arrow, you still need a good aim. You've got to have a goal. "*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children of [one's] youth*" (Psalm 127:4). Verse 5 says, "*They shall speak with the enemies in the gate*" (Psalm 127:5). That is, there are enemies. I told you at the beginning of this message that there are enemies against the home. How are we going to take the institution of the family back? By our kids—a godly seed. How are we going to shoot down the ideas of a Gloria Steinem? With our arrows. They're going to speak with the enemies. They're going to say, "That's a lie. That's not right. Here's the truth. My father taught me the

truth. My mother taught me the truth. They got it from the Word of God.” Now, many times, we’re trying to keep our children from the enemy. Friend, we ought to aim our children at the enemy—we ought to aim them at the enemy. They are our arsenal. *“They shall speak with the enemies in the gate”* (Psalm 127:5).

We just didn’t raise four children just so they could live in safety and harmony; we raised them themselves to be arrows to go out against the enemy. Now children, parents, more than any body else, determine the direction of the arrow. The aim must be sure. The Apostle John said in 3 John, verse 4: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in [the] truth”* (3 John 1:4)

Now, I have goals for myself; I have desires for my children. I can’t make a goal for any other person except for myself. I desire godly children; I will be a godly dad—I will be a godly dad. I desire godly children. But, let me give you some desires that Joyce and I have for our children. My wife has written a book; the title of the book is *The Wise Woman*. And, in that book, Joyce wrote some things that she desires for our children. I want you to listen to them, because they may be the kind of desires that you would wish for your children. I’m going to read them as she wrote them: “I want my children to really like one another. I don’t want this close relationship to end. I want the memories of childhood, laughter, and adventure to add spice to our family gatherings throughout the years. I desire for the bond of Christian love to tie us all together. I want each of them to be devoted to the person of Jesus Christ and to be filled with His Spirit. They don’t have to grow up to be in my particular denomination, but I desire that we might not experience differences in doctrines that will divide our fellowship. I desire that each of our children discover God’s particular talents and spiritual gifts for them and that they might be like garments that our Lord may readily put on to express Himself. May these talents never be channeled to the devil’s use or for self-glory. May each one first sacrifice the right to himself to Jesus Christ. Then, these gifts and talents will be theirs and His forever. I want my children to learn to pray, win souls, and minister to the needs of others, and to see Jesus Christ on each page of the Bible. I claim for each of them a Christian husband or wife filled with Your Spirit. For without You there can be no real unity.” And, I just want to “amen” Joyce. That’s what we do want.

You see, you have to have a goal. You have to have an aim. You have to have a desire before you release the arrows. Arrows are not to be collected; they’re to be projected. I think it was Anna Mow that said that “our job, as parents, is to work ourselves out of a job.” You see, when you’re an archer and you pull that thing back—that arrow is there, and you have the aim—then there comes a time—what?—when you let go. Arrows are to be straight, and they’re to be sharpened. And then, they’re to be shot. They’re to be sent. They’re to be released. There comes a time when they are in your hand; and then, there’s a time when they are out of your hand. You have to release

them into adulthood, and you just have to give them out. Our goal is to produce kids who can emotionally leave home, kids who can come to love somebody else more than they love their own parents. Boy, that's hard, isn't it? To give your daughter to be married is like giving a Stradivarius violin to a gorilla. But, you have to let go. You just have to say, "There they go." But, you just keep on praying, and the winds of grace then will send those arrows. Thank God that we have arrows to aim at the enemy.

Now, what are we saying? Look, the archer must be strong. The arrow must be straight, and the aim must be sure. "*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are [the] children of [one's] youth*" (Psalm 127:4).

Conclusion

Now, in conclusion, let me just say several things, dad, I want you to do. Let's just sum it up. Number one: Would you ask God to make you a mighty man? J. Paul Getty said, "I was a failure." Ask God to make you a mighty man. "*As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man*" (Psalm 127:4). It's God who gives you that strength. Number two: Would you get to work shaping, sharpening, and seasoning your arrows? Number three: Would you work on your skills at being an archer? Number four: Would you rethink what your goals and desires are for your family? What is your aim for your child? What kind of success do you want? Do you want him to be a successful failure, or do you want to raise a man for God, a girl for God?

You say, "Pastor Rogers, it's too late for me. The arrow's gone, and he went in the wrong direction." No, it's not too late. You can recover lost arrows, bring them back. Pray again. Ask God in mercy to give you a new chance, and pray, and pray, and pray much. For this scripture says, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh...in vain*" (Psalm 127:1). If we only knew how dependent we are upon Almighty God!

Now, in just a moment, we're going to have a gospel invitation. In just a moment, I'm going to invite people in this building and people who may be watching through television to give their hearts to Jesus Christ. You will never be a mighty woman, a mighty man, without Him.

This is Father's Day. I thank God for the memory of my dad, who died not very long ago—a godly man, lifetime deacon. I thank God for him. But, some of you say, "Pastor Rogers, you're talking about a romanticized idea that I don't know anything about. My dad was a failure," or, "My dad deserted my mother," or, "My mother deserted my dad. Our home is broken," or, "My dad died when I was little," or, "My dad was cruel and vindictive. It's very hard for me today to idealize what you're talking about." That may be true. Unfortunately, it's more and more true today, isn't it? But, I want to tell you something: there's another Father in the Glory. There is a Father in Heaven. And, Jesus

taught us to pray, *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”* (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). And, do you know that the Bible says? *“When my father and my mother [cast me off], then [will] the LORD...take me up”* (Psalm 27:10).

There is a God and Father, and He wants to be Your Father. And, the only way He can be Your Father is for you to become His child, and the only way you can become His child is to be born into His family. The Bible calls that being “born again.” And, how are you born into the family of God? By faith. Listen, the Bible says, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and [you will] be saved”* (Acts 16:31). To be saved means that every sin is forgiven. To be saved means that Jesus Christ now lives in your heart to give you peace, and power, and strength. And, to be saved means that one day, when you die, He’ll take you home to Heaven. And, I promise you on the authority of this book that I preach from, if you will pray, and say it, and mean it, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart. Forgive my sin, and save me,” He will save you instantaneously, and He will keep you saved eternally, if you trust Him. Now, if I could do it for you, I would. But, I preached as best I know how, and now I’m going to ask you to pray and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed, and eyes are closed. If you’re already saved, would you begin to pray for those round about you who may not know the Lord Jesus Christ? And, if you’re not certain that you’re saved or certain that you’re not saved and you want to get it settled, would you pray this way? Forget any one else is here and just pray from your heart. Just pray this: “Dear God”—pray it—“Dear God, I know that You love me”—and friend, oh, He does love you—“I know that You love me. I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me, and You promised to save me if I would trust You. I do trust You, Jesus”—would you tell Him that?—“I do trust You right now. Come into my heart. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Save me, Jesus”—pray that—“Save me, Jesus.”

Did you ask Him? Were you sincere? Then, thank Him. Just by faith, pray this way: “Thank You for doing it. I receive it by faith, and that settles it. You’re now my Lord, my Master, my Savior, my God, and my Father. Thank You for doing it. And, Lord Jesus, because You died for me, I will live for You. I will not be ashamed of You, and I will make it public today—I will make it public. I will not be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen.”

Protect Your Home

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 25, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 127

*“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it:
except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”*

PSALMS 127:1

Outline

Introduction

I. There Is Great Danger

A. Satan Wants to Steal Your Fellowship with God

B. Satan Wants to Kill Love

C. Satan Wants to Destroy Your Family

1. Why Pornography Is So Dangerous

a. Availability

b. Affordability

c. Anonymity

2. What We Are Up Against

a. Television

b. Movie Theaters and Videos

c. The Internet

d. Pornographic Magazines

II. There Is God-Given Deliverance

A. Lead Your Children to a Saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ

B. Help Your Children to Discern True Values

C. Teach Your Children the Principles of Purity

D. Cover Your Children with Prayer

E. Make a Family Covenant

F. Memorize Scriptures

G. Create the Right Atmosphere in Your Home

H. Remove Temptations

1. Guard the Use of the Computer

a. Put the Computer in a Public Area in Your Home

b. Spend Some Time on the Internet with Your Child

c. Make Your Child Give You His or Her Password for the Computer

d. Limit the Time Your Child Spends on the Computer

2. Learn to Tame the Television

3. Guard the Magazines and Books

4. Investigate Your Child's Friends

- 5. Screen Movies Very Carefully
 - I. Teach Your Daughters to Dress Modestly
 - J. Learn to Counterattack
- Conclusion

Introduction

One day we will behold the Lord Jesus. Psalm 127—a psalm for the home. We’ve been thinking about going home, but everybody talking about Heaven is not going there. And, you need to prepare your home; you need to get your children ready to go to Heaven. Here’s a psalm about the home: *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate”* (Psalm 127:1–5).

Now, God gave to the man an instinct to protect his wife and his children. When God put Adam in the Garden of Eden, He gave him two distinct responsibilities: one was to dress the garden; the other was to keep it. That is, he is to be the provider, and he is to be the protector.

When Joyce and I were in college, we got married after our first year in college. We’d been sweethearts for so long we just decided to go ahead and get married—just young people, very young. I just completed a year of college. We got married. Now, I was there on a football scholarship—also had a ministerial scholarship. But, if I kept the football scholarship, I had to sleep in the athletic dorm and eat at the training table. I didn’t want to do that; I wanted to be married to Joyce. And so, I forfeited the football scholarship, was called to a little church, started preaching when I was a 19-year-old boy, and pastoring that little church. We drove 130 miles one way on weekends. And, we already decided we wanted a family, so we started our family early while we were still in school. Three years of school to go pastoring a little church. And, Joyce was having some complications with the pregnancy, our first child. And so, the doctor said it would not be good for her to travel that distance in the automobile.

Well, it was Saturday, and a news report came across that there had been a prison break in a prison very near to the trailer park where our little twenty-five-foot house trailer was. And, people were told to “lock your doors. Lock your windows. Take the keys out of your car. Get the children off the streets, and be very, very careful,” because of the three men who had escaped, two were killers. So, they said, “Be very careful.” And, the prison was in the vicinity where we lived, and that night we could hear the hounds—the bloodhounds—because they had tracked them to our area. And, the

bloodhounds were baying around our trailer park and our little trailer there. And so, normally I would have gone early, but I said, “Joyce, I’m not going to go.” Actually, it was on Friday night—Saturday night, rather—and I said, “Rather than going down on Saturday, I’m going to stay here with you Saturday night. Then, I’ll get up real early Sunday morning, and I’ll drive in time to be there at church—drive that 130 miles.” So, we lay in bed that night, and we could hear the activity out around as they were trying to track those killers in our vicinity.

Early in the morning I got up to get ready. Now, our little house trailer did not have a bathroom in it. We had a path, not a bath. And, there was a community washhouse there, and I got my things together to go over there to bathe, and shave, and get ready to go. It was gray dawn. I was going to leave Joyce there. And, I looked over here behind a trailer, and I saw a convict—no doubt that he was a convict because he had on convict clothes. And, he was slipping behind a trailer. There was nobody else out there to help. I didn’t want to get engaged with some killer convict, but I didn’t want to run. I didn’t want to scream to alarm him. And, I didn’t know what he might do. I thought, “Surprise is the best weapon.” So, I decided I would pounce him.

Now, you have to understand, now, I’m there on a football scholarship. I was in pretty good shape. And, there was this man—he didn’t see me. I saw him first. I had the drop on him. Now, normally, common sense would have told me to run and get out of there. But, there’s my wife—there’s my wife. I don’t want to bring him to my house. I don’t want it to go the other way. So, I began to move closer and closer around the trailer, and then I jumped him. And, I got him around the neck, and I put him on my hip. And, I did a lock on him and put him down. And, he began to yell, and to squeal, and to say, “Let me go.” And, he said, “I’m not one of them.” I said, “Yes, you are.” He said, “I am not.” I said, “I see your uniform. I know who you are.” And, about that time, a sheriff’s deputy came around with a dog, and he said, “Mister, you can let him go. He’s a trustee.” Thank You, Lord—thank You, Lord.

Now think about that: Why on earth would I jump a man like that—a man that I thought, most likely, was a killer? I tell you one reason: there was a girl in that trailer over there, and God gave to me a protective instinct. I’m not the man I used to be then, but I’m going to tell you something: you put your hand on my wife or one of my kids, and if I can, I’ll put you on the ground. You don’t touch a man’s children; you don’t touch a man’s wife. God wants us to have a protective instinct. The man is to be the protector; he’s to be the provider.

Recently, James Dobson concluded his program, and here’s what he said: “I beg you to defend your children. If you won’t defend your kids, who will you defend? What are you willing to fight for if it is not your children?”

I. There Is Great Danger

May I tell you that there are some killers on the loose? There is great danger—there is a great danger. There is a killer on the loose. John 10 verse 10—listen to this: *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”*—Jesus said—*“[I’ve] come that they might have life, and have it...abundantly”* (John 10:10). There is a thief, a murderer, a destroyer, and he’s loose in Memphis, Tennessee. He’s in your neighborhood. He may be in your living room. And, your protective instincts need to say, “I’m going to do something about it.”

A. Satan Wants to Steal Your Fellowship with God

Now, what does Satan want to steal? Satan wants to steal your fellowship with God. Pornography steals fellowship with God. You see, *“God is light...in him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). Now, listen to 1 John 1, verses 3 and 4: *“That which [you] have seen and heard declare we unto you, that [you] may...have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ...these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full”* (1 John 1:3–4). If you’re into pornography, I will tell you, you have no joy—beyond the shadow of any doubt, you have no joy. For the Bible says, *“what [fellowship] hath light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6:14)—2 Corinthians 6, verse 14. If you have no fellowship with God, you have no fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. And, if you have no fellowship with God and your brothers and sisters in Christ, you have no joy.

Now, the Bible says that Satan is a thief (John 10:10). He wants to steal your fellowship with God. Pornography has a great appeal to your youth. But, you need to teach them that the greatest treasures—and we talked about in the first of these three messages—is fellowship with God. I wouldn’t take any thing for fellowship with God. Why would I sacrifice my fellowship with God? I cannot walk in darkness and have fellowship with Him who is light. Pornography steals fellowship with God. That’s one treasure that it steals.

B. Satan Wants to Kill Love

But, not only does it steal fellowship—number two, pornography kills love—it kills love. That’s the second great treasure—fellowship with God, and then love. You see, pornography is antithetical to love. Lust and love are opposites. Love is the greatest virtue. The Bible says, *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it [profits] me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:3)—1 Corinthians 13, verse 3. Love is the greatest virtue. To love is the greatest commandment. Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40: *“[And] Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment”* (Matthew 22:37–38).

Pornography is the opposite of love. It treats people as objects—things to be used. It is degrading. It is brutal. It is loveless. And, the devil—not only does the devil want to steal fellowship; he wants to kill love. He wants to bring death to innocence—the innocence of your children—death to purity, death to happiness; spiritual death, physical death, eternal death. Satan is a murderer. One of his chief weapons is pornography.

C. **Satan Wants to Destroy Your Family**

But, not only does he want to steal fellowship with God, not only does he want to kill love—he wants to destroy your family. You see, pornography destroys families. Why does Satan want to destroy the family? Because the family is the basic unit of society. Take away our families—our church is decimated, our city is decimated, our nation is decimated, civilization is decimated. And so, Satan wants to deceive man, defile his mind, destroy the home, and dominate the world. So, he is a thief. He is a murderer. He is a destroyer. And, he is loose, and he is loose in our city. And, you, sir, are called on to guard your heart and to protect your home. Where are the men of God today? Where are the mothers who will stand up today?

1. **Why Pornography Is So Dangerous**

Now, Satan has three on his A-team. Do you know why pornography is so dangerous? First of all, the first “A” is availability. The second “A” is affordability, and the third “A” is it is so anonymous.

a. **Availability**

Pornography today is so available—things that you used to have to go out behind the barn to see, pictures that perhaps you would purchase in a plain wrapper by some unsavory person. Pornography is everywhere. You go to the corner market for a gallon of milk—there’s pornography. You stroll through the mall—there is pornography. You go into a hotel—there, in the corner, is a television set. Just turn the dial; up comes the pornography—availability.

b. **Affordability**

Affordability—*not since Manhattan Island was sold for twenty-four dollars by the Indians has so much dirt been sold so cheaply.* It’s affordable.

c. **Anonymity**

And then, you can watch it with anonymity—in a hotel room, in a bedroom with a computer.

These three things Satan has used to steal, to kill, and to destroy.

Now, let me tell you something: you may wonder why I am saying this to the Bellevue family. I am telling you because Bellevue people are not immune. I’m telling you because Christians are not immune. The Maryland coalition against pornography did a survey, and they found out that forty to sixty percent—listen— forty to sixty percent

of Christian men are involved in pornography in some way— forty to sixty percent. “Well,” you say, “those are just old codgers. What about the young people?” Well, they did another survey of students at five Christian colleges and found that sixty-eight percent—that’s more than two-thirds—sixty-eight percent of male students said they had intentionally looked for pornography on the Internet. And, we know that in these surveys about things like that, generally, they’re understated—that some people would deny doing it when they did it. They understate the incidence of this.

2. What We Are Up Against

Now, what are we up against? Let me tell you what we’re up against when I’m telling you we need to guard your home.

a. Television

First of all, television itself—television has become the devil’s pipeline into the home. Any one knows that television is becoming more and more vile. Did you know that ninety-eight percent of American homes have televisions and only ninety-seven percent have toilets? Think about it. And, as a matter of fact, in two-thirds of America’s homes, there are two or more televisions.

Now, they’ve done surveys. The most recent survey shows that sexually explicit material has jumped twelve percent in one year—that’s overall. But, in the sitcoms (the situational comedies)—are you ready for this? It will break your heart—it has jumped twenty-eight percent from the last season. I said, “twenty-eight percent”—that’s in the sitcoms; that’s a situational comedy. Why is that? Why do they want you to laugh at that which is obscene? The devil is very wise in some ways. He is stupidly brilliant, hideously ugly. The devil knows that what he can get you to laugh at you can never take seriously again. So, he wants people to laugh at immorality, at homosexuality, at brutality, at perversion, at adultery, at sodomy—these things. And so, television is a danger that every mother’s child in this building is most likely faced with, and your little children.

Let me give you another survey. They surveyed 450 sixth graders that have cable at home. Sixty-six percent of the children—these are sixth graders—sixty-six percent admitted to watching at least one program that contained nudity or heavy sexual content in the past month. That’s sixty-six percent of sixth graders. Is this sinking in? I mean, are you listening? We’re just talking about television alone. Boy, it’s no wonder!

Who is it—who is it—that’s producing this material? Well, again, they surveyed the most respected members of a television craft. Ninety-three percent seldom or never attend church—I said, “Ninety-three percent.” Ninety-seven percent believe that is just quite all right for a pregnant woman to have an abortion. Only five percent strongly believe that homosexuality is wrong. Only sixteen percent believe that adultery is wrong. Those are the ones who are producing the television. We talk about “educational

television”—my friend, all television is education. Every thing that kids see is giving them an education. It may not be the education that you would choose or that you would want.

David Frost was correct when he said this: “Television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people that you would not have into your home.” Want me to hear it again? Okay, I will. Thank you. “Television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you would not have into your home.” Now, we’re up against television.

b. Movie Theaters and Videos

Secondly, we’re up against the movie theater and videos. There’s something called an “R-rated movie.” In 1975, R-rated movies were five percent of those produced—five percent of the movies were rated R. Today, it is over sixty-five percent. Do you see that a flood tide of slime is hitting America? Do you know why there are so many R-rated films? Well, *Parade Magazine* said that the screenwriters seek for an R rating to attract the teenagers. The teenagers shun PG and PG-13 films because they think if they watch that, that’s a sign that they are immature. And, worse than the movies themselves is the video industry. Billions, billions, billions of dollars are changing hands. In the past five years—look up here at my fingers now. Five—in the past five years, video rentals...obscene material has increased one hundred percent in five years.

c. The Internet

What else are we up against? We’re up against the Internet. Young people and adults are becoming road kill on the Information Superhighway. The Internet is the fastest growing distribution channel for illegal pornography, and it may come to your child unsolicited. A mother in New Hampshire received unsolicited, pornographic e-mail through America Online. It was live action, hardcore. The videos appeared on her screen, and the messages—listen to this—were adapted to children—messages like this: “Don’t let your mommy see you looking at this.” Can you imagine something like that coming in through the Internet? Now friend, I’m telling you, we need to develop some software for the heart.

d. Pornographic Magazines

Now, there’s another source that the devil wants to use to steal, to kill, and to destroy, and that’s the pornographic magazines let out by Hugh Hefner, now—*Hustler* and these other magazines. Surveys show that many had their first experience with pornographic magazines at a friend’s house. They asked, “Where did you first get to looking at these magazines?” Seventy-seven percent said, “At a friend’s house.” Thirteen percent said, “It was my father’s pornography.” Only one percent said, “I purchased it myself.” Seventy-seven percent at a friend’s house! Now folks, you cannot ignore this attack on your children and your home.

And, don't let anybody tell you that pornography is a victimless crime. Those who are into it are victims—perhaps self-induced victims, but they are victims. Somebody says, “Well, we just need to ignore it. It will go away. After a while, people will get bored, and it will go away. Just legalize it, and it won't be a problem any more.” If you believe that, you've got rooms to rent upstairs—unfurnished. You believe you can put out a fire with gasoline? No, what happens when people get bored with common, ordinary pornography? They go into something more perverse, something more brutal, something more wicked. Pornography is so vile because it is so addictive.

Paul Harvey told a story. I cringe when I think about it, but I'm going to use it because it so well illustrates what I'm talking about. The Eskimos hunting wolves had found a way to do it. An Eskimo will take his razor-sharp knife blade and coat it with animal blood. He'll paint it on there and let it freeze. And then, he'll put another coat of blood on it and another and another until it is heavily coated with blood. And then, he will stick the knife in the ground, the frozen ground, with the blade pointed up. A wolf is attracted by the scent of that blood. He comes and he begins to lick the blood off. And, he licks it and licks it until it's all gone, and his tongue is cut. He's so interested in the blood he doesn't even feel the sting. And now, he begins to bleed and lick his own blood. And, he licks and cuts and licks and cuts, and he is drinking his own blood until finally the Eskimos come and find the wolf dead on the frozen tundra, as he has been licking and drinking his own blood. That's what pornography does. It's something that does not satiate, but the person feeds upon it to his own destruction.

Now, I don't want to say any more about that. I've tried not to describe pornography as such, only to talk about it, because I don't want to discuss in public what it really is. I want to say something else: I made it my purpose in preparing these messages not to look at any pornography—none whatsoever. I don't ever intend to—never. But, I know what is going on. I know what is in this world today.

II. There Is God-Given Deliverance

And, I want to tell you that there is a way of deliverance. I've thought about it; I prayed about it. And, I want to tell you ten things to do, and I want you to jot these down.

Dads, you're to protect your home. You're to guard your heart. You're to protect your home. There is victory. Our psalm said in Psalm 127, verses 1 and 2: *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep”* (Psalm 127:1–2). There, God will protect your home, if you will get in concert with Him. And, we don't have to throw in the towel. You don't have to say, “Well, good night! After all those statistics, there's no other way.” Romans 12, verse 21, says, *“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with*

good” (Romans 12:21). First John chapter 4, verse 4 says, “[You] are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). You don’t have to throw in the towel.

Now, I want to give you five strategies—ten strategies—they are deeply spiritual, intensely spiritual, very practical—to teach you how you can have a clean heart in a dirty world. And, you can guard your home and protect your children.

A. Lead Your Children to a Saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ

Number one: Lead your children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. That’s the starting place: lead your children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Now, without that, I don’t know what you can do. You can scold; you can fuss. But, when you lead your children to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, not only do you deliver their soul from Hell, but you’re going to ensure that they can have three greatest values of life: that they can have fellowship with God; that they can truly love, for love is of God; and that they can have a happy home. “[For] except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1). So, lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Are your children saved? Do your children know the Lord? Were they young? Grown children? Pray over them. Weep over them. Bring them to Jesus Christ, because when you do that, you take the policeman off the street corner and you put him in the human heart.

B. Help Your Children to Discern True Values

Number two: Help your children to discern true values. In the first message that I preached, I talked about Moses. And, Moses had some discernment, and because he had some discernment, he saw the difference between good and evil. And then, Moses chose the good; and then, Moses refused the evil.

Do you remember the story I told you about the dog and the bone? If a dog has a nasty bone in his mouth, you try to take it away from him—you might get bit. But, if you put a steak on the ground, the dog sees the steak—he’ll drop the bone to get the steak. Now, what happens in that dog’s mind is this: first of all, that dog discerns. He looks: there’s the bone, here’s the bone, there’s the steak. There’s a discernment. He says, “This is better than this.” Then, there’s a choice. He says, “I want the steak. I choose the steak.” Then, he refuses the bone.

Now, you’re going to have to spend some time sitting down with your children, helping your children to understand what the values of life are. Friend, listen—let me tell you where it’s at: I would not take any thing for fellowship with God—the ability to love and to have a godly family. That’s it—that’s it. Don’t let them sacrifice these things. Lead them to Christ. Number two: Help them to discern true values. Help them to see through Satan’s lies. You see, all pornography is based on a lie—based on a lie—that this is

somehow good, tantalizing, titillating; that it will somehow satisfy. It is all a lie. Satan is a liar.

Now, if you have ever been swimming, maybe somebody throws you a beach ball, maybe in the pool, and you try to keep the beach ball under the water. You could keep it under the water as long as you sit on it—maybe. But, all of a sudden it comes; it pops up to the surface again—especially if you’ve got two or three you’re trying to keep under. That’s impossible. You push it down. You can only hold it down so long. It comes back up. That’s the way people fight pornography. They say, “I’m not going to do this any more. I don’t like this. I’m against it.” And, they put they put it down in their mind, but then it just comes to the surface again. And, they are fighting a hopeless battle. Let me tell you one way to keep that ball sunk: let the air out of it—let the air out of it. What you need to do is let the air out of Satan’s lies.

Satan is a liar—he is a liar. You need to help your children to see that Satan is a liar. And so, you help them to discern.

C. Teach Your Children the Principles of Purity

Number three: Teach them the principles of purity—how to control their thought life. How many of you were here last Sunday night? All right. From Psalm 118 I gave you these steps, and don’t tell me they won’t work. Friend, I guarantee you they will work. How do you control your thought life? Well, every person doesn’t know, but there is a plan. It is very clear; it is very plain. I cannot reiterate last week’s message again tonight. Get the tape. Listen to it very carefully. Teach them how to control their thought life.

D. Cover Your Children with Prayer

Number four: Cover them with prayer. Pray for your children. Pray for them every day. Joyce and I pray for our children by name every day. Pray for them at night. We call them by name. The wonderful thing about prayer is prayer can go where you cannot go. Ron Dunn says, “Prayer is like an intercontinental ballistics missile: it goes where you cannot go.” And, the wonderful thing about it is that the devil has no antimissile to shoot it down with. And, it travels not at the speed of light—it travels at the speed of thought. And, you can pray with a delayed detonation. You can start praying for your little children right now when they are little babies. Say, “Lord, keep them strong and pure.” Saturate your children in prayer. Pray for them every day. Cover them in prayer, because you’re in a spiritual battle, and one of your chief weapons is prayer.

E. Make a Family Covenant

Number four—and I’m going to slow down here: Make a family covenant. Now, what am I talking about when I say a “family covenant”? You know, one of the most diabolical lies

of the devil is the concept of “adult entertainment.” We see this advertised all the time—“adult entertainment.” It is not adult; it is infantile, and it is wicked. Do you know what the concept of adult entertainment says, as a child? “Now look, you can’t—you can’t—watch this because you’re not old enough, like it’s all right for Dad—it’s all right for Mom; it’s just not all right for you. But, one of these days, you’ll be old enough to enjoy what we enjoy.” You talk about phony boloney! Friend, that is phony boloney.

How do you make a family covenant? You, as a father, get the children together, and you say, “Children, we’re going to make a covenant together.” Let’s suppose your little girl’s name is Susan. “Susan, Daddy believes that pornography is wrong. He wants you to be able to love. He wants you to be able to have fellowship with God. He wants you to have a happy family. Daddy wants our family to be happy. So, I want to make covenant with you, Susan. I want to promise you in Mother’s presence and promise Mother that I will never, ever watch anything in your absence that I would not watch in your presence. I promise you before God. And Susan, I want you to make a covenant with me. I want you, darling”—or John, or whomever it is—“to make a covenant with me before God that you will never, ever watch anything in my absence that you would not watch in my presence.” Write that covenant out, and sign it before God on your knees. And then, have some token of the covenant.

Now, I’m planning to turn this series into a videotape series, and I’m going to work... We’re working on some sort of a token. I don’t have it now. It may be a key—may be a gold-plated key that girl could wear around her neck (the idea of “guard your heart”). It may be a key that a man could keep on his key ring, a symbol. It may be something like white stone. In the Bible, in the Book of the Revelation, the Lord speaks of giving to those that love Him a white stone that they might have (Revelation 2:17)—something, some kind of a covenant. You could get your own covenant. Say, “Darling, keep this. Carry it with you. I’ll put my name on it. Give me one. Put your name on it. We’re in covenant together before God.” Make a holy covenant with Almighty God.

And then, if you’re a businessman, after you have made a covenant with that little girl, you take her picture, along with her mother’s picture, with you when you travel. Put it in your briefcase. Mom, see that he has it. Sir, when you unpack, put it up there on front of the television. Put it right up there on top, and look at that little girl. And, see, sir, if you can imagine her watching what you might be tempted to watch. Or, worse—imagine her watching you watch it. Or, worse—imagine somebody using your daughter as an object of their lust. What you are watching, mister, is somebody’s daughter. It is someone made in the image of God. Make a solemn covenant before God. That’s what Job did: “I made a covenant with my eyes that I would not look upon a maid” (Job 31:1).

F. Memorize Scriptures

Next, number six: memorize scriptures—memorize scriptures. Do you remember what the Bible says in Psalm 119, verse 11? *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). You see, there, when you put the right thing in, then there’s not room for the wrong thing. I am preparing a list of scriptures. When I get them done, I’ll distribute them to those of you who want them. Maybe we’ll have to put a little price on them—get them through the bookstore. I can’t make up my mind now whether it should be fifty or one hundred—maybe two packs of fifty each—for you to memorize as a man.

When I was a boy, I memorized scripture. I had a little box of scriptures; I memorized them. I still know those scriptures. They stuck in my heart and in my mind. Often, in my preaching, scripture just comes up like that. It’s down in there, and it just comes up. You’re not too old, sir, to memorize scripture. You’re not too old, lady, to memorize scripture. But, get your kids to memorizing scripture. *“Wherewithal shall a . . . man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:9). *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against [God]”* (Psalm 119:11). Why? Because you can’t think two thoughts at one time. And, if you memorize scripture and meditate on scripture, you’re going to be thinking God’s thoughts after Him.

And, by the way, what a wonderful family project—to memorize scripture together as a family! And, when your kids learn scripture, recognize them and pay them. “Oh no, I wouldn’t pay my children to memorize scripture. Why should I bribe them?” You’re not bribing them; you’re rewarding them. A bribe is an inducement to do evil; a reward is a recognition for doing good. The Bible teaches the idea of rewards. Reward your children for learning scripture. It will be one of the best investments that you can make.

And, don’t tell me, sir, that you can’t learn. You’re a liar. You say, “That wasn’t polite, Pastor” I’ll say it again: you’re a liar. If you got 1,000 dollars for every verse you memorized, could you memorize scripture? You’re a liar. See? Now, I’m just telling you—listen to me—it is a matter of motivation. *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”* (Psalm 119:11). Memorize scripture.

G. Create the Right Atmosphere in Your Home

Number seven: Create the right atmosphere in your home—that is, scripture mottos on the wall, the right kind of music, mottos, the Ten Commandments. Plan wholesome entertainment. Make your home the best place in the neighborhood to be. Make it the kind of place that your children’s friends want to come to. Let your home ring with laughter. Let it be permeated with love. Just make your home the right place. Keep plenty of food in the refrigerator. Let them raid the refrigerator. Let them soil your rugs. Let them break down your couch with too many kids on it. So what—so what! Let your

home be a good place, a fun place, a happy place. Spend some time choosing the right television programs, the right videotapes, the right games.

H. Remove Temptations

Now, number eight—and I'm going to slow down here again: Remove temptations. I want you to turn to Deuteronomy chapter 22—I've not asked you to turn for a while; let's see if you are still awake. Deuteronomy chapter 22—I want you to look in verse 8: "*When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof*"—do you know what a battlement is? It's a wall—"*thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence*" (Deuteronomy 22:8). It's what we call a "parapet wall." In the Middle East—and I've been there many times—you could still see these parapet walls on the rooftop. Why? Because the rooftop, in Bible times, was a patio. It's also a place where they would dry their foods—a place they come up in the evening and sit, sometimes have their meals up there. Peter was on the rooftop praying when he had that vision. It's where Rahab was drying the flax, and she hid the spies on the rooftop. People in the Bible—they lived on the rooftop. What did God say to do? God said, "Now look, when you build a new house, put a wall around the roof"—why?—"to keep somebody from falling off, because if you don't put a wall there, and they fall, then their blood is on your hands."

Now, ultimately, there is absolutely nothing you can do to keep your kids from watching pornography—ultimately—because God gave them a will. But, I'll tell you one thing I don't want to do: I don't want to build a home that is dangerous for the children. If they want to climb over the wall and jump off, that would break my heart. But, I don't want to have the kind of home where they fall accidentally because I have not removed the temptations from that home. Do you understand what I am saying? You need, at least, to build the wall. You see, the Bible says, "*Except the LORD keep the [house], the watchman [wakes] but in vain*" (Psalm 127:1).

Now, let me give you another verse. I'm talking about removing the temptations, now. Romans 13, verse 14: "*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh*" (Romans 13:14). Don't make any provisions for the flesh. Now, how do you do this? We're slowing down now; we're on number eight of these ten things.

1. Guard the Use of the Computer

Number one: You need to guard the use of that computer. If you can't handle it, take an ax to it. Do not have any online service without a good filter. Again, I've asked my son, Steve, who knows more about computers than his dad will ever learn—I said, "Son, I want you to research the very best filters." He has a filtering man's thinker. You'll get that later. Have a good filter.

a. Put the Computer in a Public Area in Your Home

Number two: Put the computer in a public area in your home. Do not let your teen have a computer alone in his or her bedroom. Just don't do it. They'll scream. Let them scream. Put it in the den. Put it in the family room. Put it with the face out.

b. Spend Some Time on the Internet with Your Child

Spend some time on the Internet with your child. See what he's watching. Learn something about it yourself. Teach them never, never to open up an unsolicited email from someone they do not know.

c. Make Your Child Give You His or Her Password for the Computer

If your child has a password for his or her computer use, let them have a password, but make them give it to you. "Oh, no!" Yes—yes. You may never have to use it, but let them give it to you. I have a passkey to your office. I have a passkey to your office and your office. I don't go in to your office. But, if I needed to, I would. And, if you don't like it, tough! I'm telling you, that's your child. You say, "You want that computer? You're not going to have any secrets from me. What is there that you don't want me to know about? I'm not going to be snooping, but God wants me to protect you. Child, I'd lay down my life for you."

d. Limit the Time Your Child Spends on the Computer

Limit the time on the computer. If they find anything objectionable, let them feel free to come and talk to you about it. Don't put them down for finding it. Commend them for sharing it with you. Tell them never, never, never to fill out any kind of a questionnaire without your permission and your knowledge. And, you be careful before you get it. Now, I don't want to say any more about that because we're running out of time.

2. Learn to Tame the Television

Number two: Learn to tame the television. You need to cancel some of the subscriptions that are coming into your home. What I call "Hell's Box Office"—just cancel it. You say, "But, the movies..." Cancel it! Get it out! Find a package that you could live with. And, even there, you're going to have to monitor.

Now, suppose, in your house, there's a hole near the bottom of the wall about that big, and you live in a snake-infested area, and snakes are coming in through that hole all the time. Snakes are coming in. Snakes are coming in. Snakes are coming in—about half of them poisonous and half of them benign. Although some people say, "I've never seen one of those," snakes are coming in. And so, you say, "Now child, look—see, we've got this thing coming into our living room. You see that hole there? You see those snakes? Now, come over here child. You see that snake? That's a bad snake. Don't play with that snake. See that snake? That snake is okay. Oops, there's another bad one—that's the kind we don't like. Now, there's a good one. Now child, Mom and Dad are going out to a party. While we are gone, don't be playing with any of those bad

snakes. Do you understand? Because you'll get bit, now. And, by the way, we're going to check up on you. We're going to ask you when we come back if you've been playing with any of those bad snakes." You know what I think? I think it would be a whole lot better to nail up that hole—to nail up the hole. I'm not saying not to have television in your home. But, I am saying, dear friend, if there are poisonous snakes coming in, you think you're just going to be able to say, "Now, hey, that's a bad one. Don't mess with that one. This is a good one." Now, learn to tame the television. As a family, choose some programs to watch. Try to watch them by themselves. Be along with them.

3. Guard the Magazines and Books

Number...next, guard the magazines and the books. That's another danger that you need to get rid of. Go through your house. Got any bad magazines? Get them out! Got any bad videos? Get them out. Clean them out. I tell you what to do with them: burn them. Book burning—book burning. Yeah, burn them. If you want to tell any body, say, "Adrian Rogers said, 'Burn them'—'burn them.'" I don't believe in burning somebody else's books. I'm not trying to control somebody else's mind. Acts 19, verse 19: "*Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver*" (Acts 19:19). That's revival. I'm not talking about trying to control what somebody else is going to think, because I don't want any body to control what I think. I don't believe in some kind of book burning where you try to control somebody else's thought life, but I do believe you need to clean your house. Let Jesus help you to do a house cleaning, if you want you home to be protected.

4. Investigate Your Child's Friends

And next, investigate your children's friends—investigate friends. That's the reason I said, "Make your house the fun place to be. Let your house be headquarters." Why? Because then you get his or her friends there, and you can look them over. Remember that 77% of those who said they first go into pornographic magazines were at a friend's house—77%.

I was talking to one of our staff members. He said, "You have to be so careful when you let your children overnight—even with some of the church folks." He said, "They will watch things on video in some of the supposedly 'godly homes' that you don't want your children to see." And, he told me about a child who was visiting one of our families, and they were putting on a video. And, it was a fine video, but the little child said, "I can't watch that until I first call home, because my parents won't let me watch any video without first calling them." Pretty smart, huh? I like that. You need to guard these kids. You need to guard the friends. I'm telling you that everybody else doesn't have the standards that you and I have or that we ought to have.

5. Screen Movies Very Carefully

And then, next, friend, you need to screen the movies very carefully—very carefully. Now, here is where you're going to have a real battle, because they are going to go to school and everybody else is going to be talking about, "Did you see so-and-so? Did you see so-and-so? And, did you see so-and-so?" And, your child is going to say, "No, I didn't see that." And, they'll feel like an outsider. I had to fight this battle with my kids. "But Dad, everybody... Dad, some of the staff member's kids... Dad, some of the deacon's kids..." I said, "Well, now, look—when they raise kids as good as mine, then maybe I'll think about it." Boy, that frustrates them. They don't know what to do when I say that. Just, hey, love them, but teach them that they are not different; they are distinctive. Teach them how to stand alone. Would you let them go get a soapbox and stand and look in someone's bedroom window while someone is committing adultery for entertainment? That's what you do when you send them off to some of these movies—same thing.

I. Teach Your Daughters to Dress Modestly

Now, next, number nine—all of that is under "Removing Temptation"—number nine—and again, here's something very politically incorrect: Teach your daughters to dress modestly. There are girls that are going outside in things they ought not to have come downstairs in. You say, "Well, I want to be attractive." Yeah? What are you trying to attract? You can be beautiful. As a matter of fact, girls, oh, I wish somebody would tell you: when you try to look voluptuous, and sexy, and all that, you look silly—silly. What is more beautiful than a beautiful girl graciously and modestly dressed? The devil has done job on us.

Let me tell you something, young lady: the Bible says that if a man looks on a woman to lust after her, he's committed adultery with her (Matthew 5:28). If you dress to entice him to lust, you are an accomplice to the crime—you're an accomplice to the crime. Dress modestly. The kind of a fellow who will be attracted to you because you dress sexily is the kind of a man that you would not want for a husband anyway. Dress modestly.

And mothers, it's a battle—I know. A girl went into a dress shop and said to the sales lady, "If my mama likes this dress, can I bring it back?"

J. Learn to Counterattack

Last of these ten things: Learn to counterattack—learn to counterattack. "*Be not overcome [with] evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Romans 12:21). Now, there are ways that you cannot keep these things from happening. You walk through the mall—there it is. You turn on the television—there it is. There's a magazine on the ground, in the newsstand—there it is, there it is, there it is, there it is. You can't go around with

blindness, but you can counterattack. You see, the difference between people is not primarily what they think about as it is how they think about what they think about—how they think about what they think about. You have your son. You're walking along, and there's somebody at a news rack, looking through one of these obscene magazines. We've all been there and seen that. He's right there right in front of you. Your son is with you. What do you do? You use that as a teaching tool. You say, "Son, look at that. What do you think is going through that man's mind right now? What do you think God thinks about that? Have you ever felt that? What would you do, son? What do you think God would have us to do? Son, can you think of a good scripture that would help you in a situation like that?" Do you know what the devil did? I mean, do you know what David did? David cut Goliath's head off with Goliath's sword. You can use that against the devil if you're wise enough. Learn how to counterattack and turn it back on the enemy.

Conclusion

Well, I'm going to tell you a story, and I'll be finished. The year was 1942. America was at war. We were fighting for a little island off the coast of the Philippines, Corregidor. Now, you older men remember Corregidor—a small island. General Wainwright—Jonathan Wainwright—was the General there to protect Corregidor. General Wainwright had told President Roosevelt that he would hold the island, that he would keep the American flag flying over Corregidor, and he meant that with all of his heart. He had some bold men on that island. In April 1942, the Japanese so intensified the attack the shells were coming in from everywhere. Wainwright's men were in bunkers, huddling down. The shells were exploding. But, Old Glory—the American flag—was waving on a 100-foot flagpole. One of those Japanese shells hit that flagpole, hit the rope. And, when it did, Old Glory began to slowly come down that flagpole. The men in the bunkers looked at the flag as it was sinking lower and lower, about to hit the ground. And, it was so ominous. It was like, "This is doom. It's over." But then, there were some men there. Captain Arthur Huff and some other men—they came out of that bunker, went out there in the midst of all of that fire and caught Old Glory just before she hit the ground, and tied that rope back together, and hoisted that flag back to the top. And, there was joy in the camp. They kept the island, and they kept the flag flying.

Now, I want to tell you, Satan has let loose with all of the artillery of Hell. I've been in the ministry now for half a century. I've seen a lot of things. I have never seen anything like we're seeing today. But, I want to tell our Commander-in-Chief, the Lord Jesus, we're going to keep the flag flying—we're going to keep the flag flying.

And, as we see family values descending and enemy shells exploding, I, for one, as a father and grandfather, want to tell you something: I'm going to fight for my kids. I'm going to fight for my family. I'm going to fight for this church. I want our kids to know the

God that I know, and I want them to have those three great values: fellowship with God, the ability to love, and a Christian home. Pornography is the enemy of all of that.

Are you with me? Just remain standing. Now, I've not talked to you about political action. I've not talked to you about trying to clean up television or clean up Hollywood. I've not talked to you about anything like that. That needs to be done, but friend, in many ways, that's so much bigger than we are. But, there's one thing we can do. And, rather than complaining about what we can't do, you know what we can do? We can guard our hearts, and we can protect our homes. That, we can do. We'll start there.

We're going to sing an invitational hymn. If you've never given your heart to Jesus Christ and you want to be saved, the Bible teaches that, if you'll receive Him by faith, that He'll save you. To be saved means that every sin is forgiven. To be saved means that Jesus Christ lives in your heart to give you peace, and power, and purpose. To be saved means that when you die, you're going to heaven.

Cultivating Contentment in the Home

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 9, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

*“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house:
thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”*

PSALMS 128:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. What Destroys Contentment?
 - A. Covetousness Is Deceptive
 - B. Covetousness Is Debasing
 - C. Covetousness Is Destructive
- II. What Defines Contentment?
 - A. Faith for the Family
 - B. Fellowship for the Family
 - C. Food for the Family
- III. What Develops Contentment?
 - A. Learn to Trust
 - B. Learn to Thank
 - C. Learn to Love
 - D. Learn to Give

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s Word and find, please, Psalm 128. You’re familiar with the Psalms, you know it’s one of the best Psalms in the Bible on the family. We’re in a series of Bible studies entitled, “Celebrating the Family.” But, there’s something that wars against the family, and it is a spirit of discontent—discontent. I’m going to talk to you today about how to cultivate contentment in your home—cultivating contentment.

So many homes really are a swamp of discontent, and the mosquitoes of strife and arguments are breeding and constantly nagging at us. And, we have people today who, rather than getting to live, they’re living to get. And, Madison Avenue’s done a good job on us. Madison Avenue’s given us a real case of the *wants*, and we have the idea that

in order to be happy we have to have certain things. Madison Avenue tells us, “You deserve the best. You’ve got it coming to you. And, if you get these things, then you’ll be gloriously happy like all of the pretty faces on television.” But, you know and I know that many families really, because of this, are financial time bombs getting ready to explode.

Well, we have a picture of a contented family here in Psalm 128, and there are only six short verses. Let’s read them all: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:1–6).

Well, we’re talking about contentment. What is contentment? May I give you a definition of contentment? Contentment—here it is—is an inner sufficiency that keeps us at peace in spite of outward circumstances. Contentment: an inner sufficiency that keeps us at peace in spite of outward circumstances. Now, actually, in the New Testament the word *contentment* has the idea of being self-contained. You remember Paul said when he was in that Roman jail, *“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”* (Philippians 4:11).

The idea actually means, “I’m self-contained; I don’t have to look at circumstances to find my peace.” When the space shuttle goes up, they put everything on board the people are going to need, because there’s no 7-11 in the neighborhood up there. It is self-contained; it has everything on board. Now, a Christian, a person who has the Lord Jesus Christ in his or her heart has that contentment, that self-containment.

Now, let me say this about contentment, however: contentment is not complacency; it is not being laid back; it is not being self-satisfied. Many of us need to get busy. There is so much room for improvement, there is so much more that we could be, should be. And, contentment does not mean learning to do without possessions only. You can have possessions and be content. You can not have possessions and be content. Remember what the Apostle Paul said? “I’ve learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I’ve learned to abound” (Philippians 4:11–12). And, there’s nothing wrong with abounding. Friend, if you’re abounding today, you’ve got plenty, I’m so grateful for you; that’s wonderful. But, just be content with it. “I’ve learned to abound, I’ve learned to be abased, but I’ve learned in whatsoever state I am—good or bad, rich or poor—I have learned to be content” (Philippians 4:11–12).

Now, the Bible is not against your having things. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, “It is the Lord thy God that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18). The

Bible says, “God takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants” (Psalm 35:27), and, “Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

So, it doesn't take poverty to learn contentment; it doesn't take riches to learn contentment. But, we must learn contentment. Remember in that passage of Scripture in Philippians chapter 4, verse 11, Paul says, “*For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*”

May I give you three things that you need to learn if you'd have family contentment, because, friend—listen to me now—if there's not contentment at home, you've got industrial-strength problems. I mean the devil had rather hurt you at home than any place else, because if you hurt at home, you just hurt all over, and if your home, as I say, is a swamp of discontent, you have got real problems.

I. What Destroys Contentment?

Number one: let's learn what destroys family contentment—what destroys family contentment. Now, we read Psalm 128, and it's an obvious picture of contentment. But, let's take another verse and lay down alongside of it, and that would be Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17. The Bible says there in the Ten Commandments, “*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's*” (Exodus 20:17).

Now, here in the Ten Commandments, the last of these 10 is, “*Thou shalt not covet.*” It's a very interesting commandment. Before I look at that for just a moment, let me say this: that the Ten Commandments were given primarily to the family. Did you know that? God gave the Ten Commandments, and He said, “Now, dads, teach these to your sons and grandsons, that you'll have a happy family.” And, God gives all of these nine laws for living, and then God sums it up with the last one: “*Thou shalt not covet.*”

Now, why did God put that last? Because it sums up all of the others. All of the other commandments deal with actions, but this last one deals with attitude. All of the others deal with deeds, but this last one deals with desire. What's in your heart? Covetousness. What is covetousness? Well, we told you what contentment is. Covetousness is unlawful desire that comes out of discontent. Actually, this particular commandment deals with the heart.

A. Covetousness Is Deceptive

Now, let me tell you why covetousness is so bad. Now, number one, it's so deceiving. Covetousness is very deceptive. You may have a heart full of covetousness this morning sitting in this building, you look so good—and you do really look good—you

look so good, so holy; your eyes are up here, and your Bibles are open; but, you may have a heart that is eaten up with covetousness. Francis Xavier, a great Roman Catholic theologian, said this. He said, “I have listened to thousands and thousands of confessions. Never one time have I ever heard anyone confess the sin of covetousness.” Interesting, isn’t it? It’s such a deceptive sin. “Never one time anyone ever confessed the sin of covetousness.”

The Apostle Paul was a very righteous man. He lived a life of excellence before he got saved. He was doing well. One day the Apostle Paul had the Ten Commandments out, and he was checking them off. “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3)—said, “I don’t do that.” “*Thou shalt not make any graven images*” (Exodus 20:4)—“I don’t do that.” “*Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain*” (Exodus 20:7)—“I don’t do that.” “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12)—“yes, I do that.” “*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8)—“yes siree.” “Don’t steal” (Exodus 20:15)—“I don’t.” “Don’t kill” (Exodus 20:13)—“I don’t.” “Don’t commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14)—“never have. Boy, what a good boy am I!” Said, “I was just doing real good, I was doing super good, till,” he said, “I got to the last commandment, and I read that one, and it wiped me out.” Listen to how he said it. Romans 7, verse 7: “*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law:*”—that is, “The law is what peeled me back and showed me I was a sinner”—“*for I had not known lust,*”—now, *lust* means, “unlawful desire”—“*except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet*” (Romans 7:7). Paul said, “I would have given myself an A till I got down to this last commandment, and it said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” I want to tell you something, folks: that many folks, many of us in this room, may be covetous and not know it.

B. Covetousness Is Debasing

It’s very deceitful, and I want to tell you something else. It is very debasing. Do you know what unlawful desire, a lack of contentment, does? Covetousness? It reveals how wicked our hearts are. Now, put in your margin Mark chapter 7—don’t even turn to it; just write it down in your margin and let me just read it to you—beginning in verse 21. Jesus is talking, and He’s talking about your heart and my heart, and He says, “*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts...*”—now, these things come out of our heart. Now, listen—“*evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts,*”—pretty bad list, isn’t it? Notice the next thing—“*covetousness.*” Notice the company that covetousness keeps. Let me read it again: “*For...out of the heart...proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man*” (Mark 7:21–23).

Now, God just turns his X-ray into our hearts, and He says all of these things are in the human heart. Now, we don't realize that, but I want to tell you that you, as Nan sang, a sinner saved by grace, still have an old evil heart. That old nature is still there, and the old man is still there. And, we are potentially, with our nature, worse than the worse man has ever been, actually, apart from the grace of God. These things are down in our heart; they were born in our heart.

You ever eat an apple and find a wormhole, don't worry: there's no worm in the apple. The wormhole is not there for the worm to get in, but for the worm to get out. The worm was hatched in the blossom. The egg is there in the blossom, and the worm finds its inception there inside the apple and eats its way out.

These things that come out of our heart. They were there; we were born with them. The Bible says we are *"by nature the children of wrath"* (Ephesians 2:3).

Did you know little children are covetous? "Prove it." Take any little child, put him in a room surrounded by 15 toys—he'll be playing with one. Let your neighbor come over to visit, put her little baby on the floor, and he'll go over and pick up one of those toys, and this kid will drop the one he's playing with and go over there and bop that kid and take that toy away from him. We are absolutely, by nature, covetous. I, me, mine—we want it for ourselves.

And, where does it come from? Jesus said, in John 8, verse 44, *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do"* (John 8:44). How did Satan become Satan? He coveted the place that God had. He said, "I want to be like the Most High. I want the throne of God. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (Isaiah 14:13–14). How did he encourage Eve to sin? Through covetousness—to take that which was not hers. She was surrounded in a garden, a beautiful garden, but there was one piece of fruit she didn't have, and he said, "You go ahead and take this" (Genesis 3:1–6).

I was reading an article the other day about some MBA students at prestigious Duke University, and they asked these students in order that they might teach them more, these MBA students going into business, "What do you want to learn? How do you want us to teach you?" Let me just quote from the article: "For several years, MBA students at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business were asked to write a personal strategic plan. The question posed to them was, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' With few exceptions, they wanted three things: money, power, and things—very big things, including vacation homes, expensive foreign automobiles, yachts, and even airplanes. They were primarily concerned with their careers and the growth of their financial portfolios. Their personal plans contained little room for family, intellectual development, spiritual growth, social responsibility, or more effective management. Their mandate to the faculty was, 'Teach me how to be a moneymaking machine. Give

me only the facts, tools, and techniques to ensure my instantaneous financial success.” Well, I can promise you one thing. If they got that instantaneous financial success, they would not be satisfied.

The Bible said that, *“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver”* (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Listen to me and don’t forget this. A discontented man is never rich, and a contented man is always rich. A discontented man, I don’t care how much he has, he’s never rich; a contented man is always rich. And, somebody who is not content with what he has will not be content with what he would have. And, to whom little is not enough, nothing is enough.

C. Covetousness Is Destructive

Covetousness is wrong. Now, I’m not saying that it is wrong to have godly ambition; I’m not saying it’s wrong to have things. But, covetousness is so deceptive. It is so debasing. And, friend, it is so destructive. Now, this verse I really would like you to turn to—1 Timothy chapter 6, a classic passage on family contentment—1 Timothy chapter 6, and let’s begin to read in verse 6. Now, he’s talking about contentment. Listen to it now: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”* Now, that’s really the bottom line of all that I have to say today. *“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”*—great gain. *“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”* Somebody said, “You never saw a hearse with a U-haul behind it.” *“And having food and raiment”*—that’s just something to eat and something to wear—*“let us be therewith content”* (1 Timothy 6:6–8). That’s all you have to have—that’s all you have to have. You can’t go around naked, and you’ve got to eat. Jesus said, “Foxes have holes, and birds have nests; I don’t even have a place to lay my head” (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). But, He wasn’t discontent. Having food and clothing, “let us be therewith content.”

But now, watch this—verse 9: *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after,”*—there’s our word—*“they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Timothy 6:9–10). Now, that doesn’t say that they that are rich. The Bible is not against riches. Abraham was rich. David was rich. Solomon was rich. Joseph of Arimathea was rich. But, it says, *“they that will be rich.”* What does that mean? It means that is their dogged determination, just like these students at Duke: “That is what I want. I have set my course to be rich.” When you do that, you’re living on dangerous ground.

Every so often a man speaking in a university or a high school will give a baccalaureate speech or whatever, and he’ll give this advice, trying to get the kids to be ambitious, and he’ll say something like this: “Now, young people, make all the money

you can, just so you make it honestly.” That sounds like good advice. That’s terrible advice. Why? Because nobody has a right to make all the money he can, because if you’re making all the money you can, you’re going to be making money when you ought to be doing something else. You’ll be making money when you ought to be spending time with your wife and family. You’ll be making money when you ought to be sleeping. You’re going to be making money when you ought to be soul-winning. You’re going to be making money when you ought to be worshiping. There are a lot of people who are making all the money that they can, and when they’re making all the money that they can, what are they doing? They’re putting things first. And, when you put things first, you know what that is? It’s idolatry. Anything you love more, serve more, desire more, fear more, value more than God is an idol.

Now, folks, when you are guilty of idolatry, you are guilty of something terrible. Listen. Jesus said, in Luke chapter 16 and verse 13, *“No servant can serve two masters...”*—boy, that’s strong—*“No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other”* And, if you’re wondering what two masters he’s talking about, he says, *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Luke 16:13). *Mammon* is just another word for things. And then, Jesus said, in Matthew chapter 6, verse 33, *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matthew 6:33). God will not work in second place. When you put God in second place, that is idolatry. And, that’s the reason the Bible calls covetousness idolatry. *We have, “In God we trust” on our money, but we have “me first” written in our hearts.*

Let me give you a verse that proves beyond the shadow of any doubt that covetousness is idolatry. Colossians 3, verse 5: *“Mortify”—*that means, “put to death”—*“therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5). Now, remember covetousness is a very deceitful thing. Many of us would not say that we’re covetous, but covetousness, according to Paul here in this passage to Timothy, is like an octopus. It just wraps its tentacles around you and drags you down. Many people get their identification by what they own, what they possess. A psychiatrist asked this question one time: “If I am what I possess, and I lose those things, then what am I? What am I, if I am what I possess, and if I lose those things, then what am I? Who am I then?”

I heard about a man who loved gold; I mean, just loved it, had an inordinate affection for gold. Finally, he got a lot of gold. He loved it, and so he decided it was time for him to redecorate his bedroom. So, he put down a golden-colored carpet, painted the walls parchment color, got yellow drapes, got a gold-colored bedspread, even bought him some yellow pajamas, everything; he just loved gold. Everything was gold all around.

But then, he got sick. He came down with—would you believe?—yellow jaundice. Do you know what yellow jaundice is? It turns you yellow. And, there he was up in his bedroom. His wife called the doctor and said, “Doctor, he’s upstairs.” The doctor went up to examine him; came back down with a bewildered look. The wife said, “Well, how is he?” He said, “I don’t know. I couldn’t find him.” People who get lost in these things can’t find themselves.

II. What Defines Contentment?

Now, folks, this is what destroys family contentment—and that is covetousness, unlawful desire; not wrong to have things, but unlawful desire, a spirit of dissatisfaction. Number two: let’s think—learn—about what defines family contentment. We’ve talked about what destroys it. What defines family contentment? What is real family contentment? Well, look in Psalm 128. There are three things.

A. Faith for the Family

Number one: faith for the family—faith for the family. Look in verse 1: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways”* (Psalm 128:1). The secret of satisfaction, of true contentment, is God himself. To tell the man on the street that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the secret of satisfaction, he would laugh at you. That’s the last thing he would believe would give him satisfaction.

But, let me give you some verses. And, jot them down, because, hey, folks, these are great for your children, family worship; these are great for you to put on your refrigerator door. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 5. Now, remember we’re talking about contentment. Listen to this: *“Let your conversation be without covetousness...”*—this is Hebrews 13:5. The word *conversation* literally means, “behavior”—*“Let your [behavior] be without covetousness; and be content...”*—listen—*“be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said,”*—that’s God now—*“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). All right, I’m telling you the first secret of family contentment is God Himself.

The Psalmist said, in Psalm 73, verses 25 and 26, *“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever”* (Psalm 73:25–26). And then, remember the scripture we read in 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 6: *“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Timothy 6:6).

I was reading about Ernest Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway was a brilliant man, a great, great writer, a literary genius. He had fame. He had notoriety. He had money. He had everything at his fingertips that many people are striving after. And, he wrote some words and then committed suicide. You know what he wrote? He said this about life. He

said, “Life is just a dirty trick, a short journey from nothingness to nothingness.” Isn’t it a shame he didn’t know Jesus? Isn’t that a shame?

B. Fellowship for the Family

You see, the first thing is the family faith—faith for the family. Second thing—look at this Psalm again: not only faith for the family, but fellowship for the family. Look in verses 2 and 3: “*Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table*” (Psalm 128:2–3). Now, folks, that’s where it’s at: your wife, your children, the family fellowship right there. There she is, clinging to you like a vine, fruitful, luxuriant. There you are, providing for the family, eating the labor of your hands. There are your children, like olive plants, which are very valuable in the Middle East. Having that fellowship.

Folks, if people today who are foregoing having children so they can have things would wake up and understand that children don’t make a rich man poor, they make a poor man rich. You can’t take your riches to Heaven—I’m taking my children to Heaven. There’s where the riches are. It’s the family fellowship. The Bible says in the preceding Psalm that children are the “*heritage of the LORD*” (Psalm 127:3). Where does contentment from? What is the source? The family faith. And, the family fellowship.

A very wise man, a gifted man, looked back upon his life and asked himself, “If I could do it all over again, what would I do with my family?” Let me read what he said to you. He said, “I would love my wife more in front of my children. I would laugh with my children more at our mistakes and at our joys. I would listen more, even to the youngest child. I would be more honest about my own weaknesses and stop pretending perfection. I would pray differently for my family. Instead of focusing on them and their faults, I would focus more on me. I would do more things with my children. I would be encouraging and bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things: deeds and words of lovingkindness. And, finally, if I had it to do all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family; I would use every ordinary thing that happened and every ordinary day to point them to God.”

That’s the family fellowship. Folks, that is where it’s at. Many times we envy the wealthy. Now, J. Paul Getty in his day—many of you’ve heard of him—one of the wealthiest men that ever lived in his day—of course, he’s not Bill Gates or somebody else, but he’s in another generation—had a tragic life. J. Paul Getty wrote, he said, “I’ve not been given to envy, but,” he said, “the person that I envy is the person that has a happy home, those who know how to make marriage work.” He was married five times, and all of them were failures—no family contentment.

C. Food for the Family

Now, here's the third thing you need. Watch. You need faith for the family. You need fellowship for the family. And, you need food for the family. Look again at verse 2: *"Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee"* (Psalm 128:2). It's amazing, isn't it? He's speaking here of the most simple things of life. He's talking not about luxuries; he's talking about necessities. Philippians 4, verse 19: *"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:19)—not all your greed, but all your needs. If you would be content, learn to enjoy the simple things of life, which are the best things.

We try to read, when our grandchildren are present, a Proverb in the morning. That's one of the best family worships I know. And, Proverbs chapter 15, verses 16 and 17, says this: *"Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,"*—just plain vegetables—*"than a stalled ox"*—filet mignon—*"and hatred therewith"* (Proverbs 15:16–17). Learn, folks, to let your home ring with love and laughter, conversation and fun, and be content with the simpler things of life.

I'm telling you these gadgets will not make you happy. You take these kids, their closet is crammed full of the latest styles. They've got a computer. They've got every electronic gadget; they have everything there to entertain them. And, what do they say? They look and say, "I haven't got anything to wear." "I'm bored." Why? They have not learned to enjoy the very basic things. You say, "Well, I want my kids to have things I never had." That's okay. I want my kids to have things my dad never gave me. Okay, but are you giving them the things your dad did give you? I mean, the desire to work, honesty, decency, learning to get along with these things. Teach your kids that the necessities are all it takes—having food and clothing. Let's be content. And, I would to God that we'd get this in our hearts.

III. What Develops Contentment?

Now, here's the third and final thing. I've talked about what destroys family contentment. I've talked about what defines family contentment—the family faith, the family fellowship, and the family food. It's just so simple—so simple. Now, here is, friend, what develops family contentment. In this Psalm you can find the same thing. Remember that Paul said: that contentment must be learned. He said, in Philippians 4, verse 11, *"I have learned,"*—I have learned—*"in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"* (Philippians 4:11). And, again let me remind you of the definition of *contentment*. It is an inner sufficiency that keeps us at peace in spite of outward circumstances.

Now, four simple things; here they are, four things you can learn.

A. Learn to Trust

Number one: Learn to trust God. Look again in verse 1: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD”* (Psalm 128:1). If you don’t do that, you’re never going to be content. *“Godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Timothy 6:6). Learn to trust the Lord. Have you done that? Do you have faith for your family? Is your family a God-centered family? No wonder you’re discontent. You’re like a square peg in a round hole.

B. Learn to Thank

Number two: Not only learn to trust, but number two, learn to thank. *Don’t be grumbly hateful; be humbly grateful.* God has been so good to you. Look in verses 3 and 4—look at it again: *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed”* (Psalm 128:3–4). That’s it! “Thank you, Lord, for this food. Thank you, Lord, for my wife. Thank you, Lord, for my children. I am a blessed man!” Families need to learn how to thank God. It would be good for you to get a family diary and write in it the blessings of God. It would be good for you to sit down and rehearse with your children day after day after day the things that God has done for them. Joyce and I just celebrated our wedding anniversary. The verse that’s been the theme to us of that wedding anniversary: *“The LORD hath done great things for [them]; whereof [they] are glad”* (Psalm 126:3). Learn to thank God.

C. Learn to Love

Number one: Learn to trust. Number two: Learn to thank. Number three: Learn to love. Look in verse 5 of this Psalm: *“The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life”* (Psalm 128:5). It’s not just simply for your own family. Lift up your eyes, look at others, look at this city, look at people who are in need, and learn to love. Do you know what a covetous person is? A covetous person is a person who loves things rather than people. Do you know what a contented person is? A contented person is a person who loves people rather than things.

Have you ever had something you were satisfied with—maybe you had a Honda—until you met somebody who had a BMW? And then, you meet somebody with a BMW, and you’re satisfied, until you meet somebody has a Porsche or a Jaguar. Or, have you ever thought, “Boy, we sure do have a nice house,” until you visit somebody else? Good night, where did they get all this stuff? How did they do this? Where did all this come from? And, all of a sudden, your house that you were so happy with, you’re not happy with it anymore. You know why? You don’t love those people. I make it a habit—nobody hears me do it, but I walk into a lovely, gracious home, I bow my head, and I thank God for His blessings on those people; say, “Thank you, Lord, for blessing those people; thank you that You’ve been this good to them.” Teach your children that somebody

else's blessing is not their loss. You cannot be covetous and love people. And, you cannot love people and be covetous.

D. Learn to Give

Learn to trust. Learn to thank. Learn to love. And, learn to give—learn to give. If you want family contentment, let your family learn to give.

Years ago I shared with you a story I'm going to share with you again, because it fits so perfectly right here. A congressman told this story; he told it to his pastor. He said, "I took my son to McDonald's. We were going to have some father-son fellowship." You know how we all dream of that? And, he said, "My son wanted a large order of fries, and he got this large order of fries, and we sat down, father and son, to have some fellowship. And, I sat there across from him and looked at that large order of fries, and they smelled so good I thought I'd have a couple. So, I reached out my hand to get a couple french fries, and my son put his hand on my hand and said, 'Hey, those are mine.'" He said, "I thought to myself, 'My son has a problem, a real problem,' and it just flew all over me. And, I got to thinking, 'Number one, doesn't he know who bought those fries and gave them to him? And, doesn't he know that, if I wanted to, I could buy him more fries? I could go up there and order 20 orders of fries and bury him in french fries. And, doesn't he know, if I wanted to, I could take those away from him that he already has—if I wanted to. And, doesn't he know that, if I wanted some french fries for myself, I could go buy them for myself? I've got the money to do that. And, I could go over to another table and eat them all by myself. Doesn't he know that I'm trying to have fellowship with him?' And," he said, "before I could tell the story, more time than I could think, God spoke to my heart and said, 'My son, that's the way you are sometimes. I have given you blessings, and when I ask for a part of that blessing, you say, 'Hey, that's mine.'" And, God said, 'Son, don't you know that I could take that whole thing from you if I wanted to? And, don't you know, if I wanted to, I could give you more. And, don't you know that I don't need that? I am God, anything I want, the earth is mine, and the fullness thereof. Don't you know that I was wanting to have some fellowship with you?'"

Conclusion

Oh, friend, may God have mercy upon the spirit of greed that's in our hearts, understanding all that we have has come from God. And, families need to learn to trust, to thank, to love, and to give. And, if you have a contented home, I'm telling you, you are blessed indeed. And, if you don't, I don't care what else you have, read this Psalm over again, and let it come into your heart.

Heads are bowed; eyes are closed. While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, let me tell you that, "*Godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1 Timothy 6:6). You've got

to have God; that's where it begins. Blessed is the man that fears the Lord. Blessed is the woman, the boy, the girl, that fears the Lord. The fear of the Lord doesn't mean slavish dread; it means reverence and love and awe for Almighty God.

Father, I pray now that you would cultivate and inculcate in my heart a spirit of gratefulness and root out any covetousness. Lord, help me and us to be content with little, if You've given little, or much, if You've given much. Thank you, Lord, for Your goodness to the sons and daughters of men.

Faith of Our Fathers

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 21, 1992

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”

PSALMS 128:3

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Character He Lives
- II. The Companion He Loves
 - A. A Good Wife Is Faithful
 - B. A Good Wife Is Fruitful
 - C. A Good Wife Is Fragile
- III. The Children He Leads
 - A. Don't Under-Discipline Your Child
 - B. Don't Over-Discipline Your Child
- IV. The Contribution He Leaves
 - A. National Security
 - B. A Personal Legacy

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you find in God's Word Psalm 128? The title of our message this morning is the title of a song that we sang earlier: "Faith of Our Fathers." In just a moment, we're going to read Psalm 128. But, may I say today that if you're a daddy, if you're a father, yours is an awesome and a fearful assignment in the day and age in which we live because you must lead your family through what I want to call a "minefield," and I'm telling you, it's very, very dangerous. As you look around, there are the wrecks of families. The landscape is littered with debris—the wounded, the maimed, the destroyed. You'll see over here a family that's been blown to bits by financial pressure. Over here we see families that have been devastated and shattered by immorality. My dear friends, our children today live in an age where baby killing is called "freedom of choice." Our children today live in an age where sodomy is called "sexual preference." They live in an age today where adultery is called an "affair," and you've got to lead your children through a minefield like this. There are families that have been devastated and blown to

bits by drugs and alcohol that are available everywhere.

Dads, I know that you want to bring your children and put them under your arms and somehow get them safely through. And, the problem is, in many homes, we say, “Well, it’s a jungle out there.” Dear friend, when you open the door and come inside, it’s a jungle in there. There’s a job to be done today—a big one. I want to say very plainly and very clearly, it all begins with Dad. America is not going to be changed until the homes are changed. You will agree with that. You’ll not change America until you change the home. I’m going to tell you something else: you’re not going to change the home until you change the dads in America. The problem in America today, very frankly put, is failing fathers and dropout dads.

Now, Psalm 128 was written to daddies; it’s a father’s psalm. It tells of the faith of our fathers; listen to it: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”* (Psalms 128:1–6) Now, there are several things I want you to see in this psalm that talks about the godly dad, the faithful father.

I. The Character He Lives

The very first of which is I want you to see the character that he lives—the character that he lives out in his daily life. Look in verses 1 and 2: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.”* (Psalms 128:1–2) Here’s a father—here’s a dad—and it’s very obvious that he is a God-fearing, hard-working dad. That’s what verses 1 and 2 tell us: he’s a God-fearing, hard-working dad. Now, that’s just a good start. He has a fear of God. Now, a fear of God doesn’t mean that he cringes when he thinks of God. The phrase “fear of God,” used in the Bible, speaks of a reverence of God. Someone has described the fear of God as love on its knees, and a person who fears God the most loves God the very best. But, a wife needs to see in her husband a fear of God. Children need to see, more than anything else, in their dad a fear of God.

Some years ago, I read of a soul winner who had gone into a particular home to witness to a man, a daddy, about Jesus. And, the soul winner was presenting the cause of Christ to this dad, and this dad was being very polite to him. He was nodding and saying, “Yes, I see. Yes, thank you very much. I appreciate your coming by. Yes—oh, yes—we are familiar with that church. Oh, yes, we’ve heard this and that.” But, the

father, while being quite polite, was very diffident, very distant, to the gospel, and it was obvious that he was trying to get rid of this individual who had come in to witness to him. There was a little fella down there on the floor playing. The father was not even aware that the little boy was listening to the conversation that was going on. Finally, in defeat and despair, that man who was witnessing the cause of Christ left that house, and when he was gone, the little boy climbed up into his daddy's lap, put his arms around his daddy's neck, and said, "We don't want to be a Christian, do we, Daddy?"—"We don't want to be a Christian, do we, Daddy?" Every little boy wants to be like his dad.

Did you know that I was sitting at a revival crusade—I was not saved; I was not born again—but I was sitting at a revival crusade because somebody invited our family. I was sitting here, and my dad was sitting here, right next to the aisle. When the invitation was given, my dad stepped out and gave his heart to Jesus Christ. I was overwhelmed that my dad stepped out and gave his heart to Jesus Christ. Do you know who the next guy down the aisle was? A boy named Adrian Rogers following his dad down that aisle to give his heart to Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord.

I can remember when our first child came into this world—a boy named Steven. He was born just like all kids are. I don't know why they arrange to be so very early in the morning—midnight almost—but he did. I'll never forget that experience. Oh, what an experience it was! You think it's hard on mothers—oh, listen, it's tough on dads; it's really tough on dads. Joyce gave me the elbow and said, "Adrian, I think it is time." I said, "Joyce, are you certain?" She said, "Yes." We were living in a little house trailer and going to college at that time. We didn't have a telephone. Well, we didn't even have an indoor bathroom in that house trailer, much less a telephone; we had a common washhouse there that we used. And, I jumped out of bed and said, "Oh, we're supposed to call the doctor," and she said, "Yes, call the doctor and tell him we're coming."

I ran out to that little house out there where the telephone was—and it was in the middle of the night; there was not a soul around—and there was that little office house there, and I couldn't get in; it was locked. And, I said, "Oh, no! It's locked. I've got to get the doctor." Folks, I thought this was the biggest crisis since the dropping of the A-bomb. And, I ran back to my car, opened the car, and got a tire tool and pried open the window, as I remember, to get into that place to make a telephone call. And, I skinned my knees going over into the window, and ran to the phone. Folks, it was a pay phone. I didn't have anything, and I had to get back out and go back in and get a nickel, or whatever it was, and put it in that pay phone and call that doctor and get down there to the hospital.

And Joyce—she really did deliver fast. And, I remember when that nurse came out and said, "Mr. Rogers, you're a daddy. You've got a son." I cannot tell you the joy in my heart. And, God let me see that little boy and Joyce as they were on their way back to

the room, and I went back to that little trailer that morning and got on my knees and said, “O God, if I never preach a good sermon, if I never am a good pastor, if I never have any worldly possessions, if nobody ever hears my name, O God”—and this is what I prayed—“O God, I want to be a good dad—I want to be a good dad.” And, I tell you, I have a greater ambition and a greater desire to be a good daddy than I have to be a good pastor—and I want to be a good pastor. But, my dear friend, I want to be a God-fearing dad that my children can look up to.

Folks, I’m telling you, your kids need you to fear God. They’re facing humanism that tells them that man is the center of everything. They’re facing materialism that tells them that happiness belongs in things. They’re facing all kinds of relativism that tells them there are no absolutes, no fixed standards of right and wrong, and they need a God-fearing dad.

II. The Companion He Loves

But now, wait a minute. Look again, if you will—look not only at the character that he lives (verses 1 and 2), but look at the companion he loves (verse 3): *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of [thy] house.”* (Psalms 128:3) I love that. That speaks not only of his character but his companion, his wife—like a fruitful vine. And, I’ve thought of Joyce so many times under that metaphor, “a fruitful vine,” because that’s exactly what a good wife is.

A. A Good Wife Is Faithful

Number one: She’s faithful: like a vine, she clings to him.

B. A Good Wife Is Fruitful

Number two: She’s fruitful, and she’s *“fruitful in [all] good [works]”* (Colossians 1:10)—fruitful to bear children, but fruitful in every aspect. “Like a fruitful vine,” the Bible says. (Psalms 128:3)

C. A Good Wife Is Fragile

And, she’s faithful, she’s fruitful, but she’s fragile. You see, a vine needs the support that the house gives, and she’s like *“a fruitful vine by the [side] of [the] house”* (Psalms 128:3) leaning on and depending upon you, Dad.

I want to say again, the best thing, Dad, that you can do for your kids, first of all, is to fear God; secondly, is to love their mamma. It’s not all that complicated. “Fear God”—verse 1. Number two: Love your wife—that fruitful vine that God has given by the side of your house. (Psalms 128:3) You say, “Well, I don’t know. My love is growing cold.” Well then, friend, fire it up. You can choose to love your wife. Let me tell you something: it is not love that holds your marriage together; it’s marriage that holds your love together. I

mean, you make a commitment. You say, “I will by the grace of God.” God has commanded you to love your wife.

III. The Children He Leads

But, I want to move quickly past these verses to get at the last part of verse 3. Look at it again: *“Thy wife shall be...a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.”* (Psalms 128:3) Now, we see the character he lives, the companion he loves, but now I want you to see the children he leads—the children he leads. *“Thy children [shall be] like olive plants.”* (Psalms 128:3)

Now, if you lived in the Middle East, you’d understand why he talked about a child being like an olive plant—not a full-grown olive tree, but an olive plant. An olive plant needs to be cultivated and cared for until it will become an olive tree. Now, the olive is a very productive tree in the Middle East. It’s green. It’s beautiful. It is productive. It is valuable, and friend, it is very, very stable. You can go to Israel and go to the Garden of Gethsemane. They have olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane that some believe are two thousand years old that may have been there when Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Those are mature olive trees. But, God’s Word says that the children that you lead are going to be olive plants round about your table. (Psalms 128:3) Now, an olive plant, like any fragile plant, needs to be cared for; it needs to be nurtured, and that’s the reason he says they’re going to be *“like olive plants round about [your] table.”* (Psalms 128:3)

You know, the problem in America today is phantom fathers, failing fathers, dropout dads. Some of you spend such a little time with your children. I read a cartoon where a business executive said to his secretary, “Mrs. Chortle, I want to be a better father. Would you try to locate my children for me, please?” A lot of executives are just about that way. I read with a broken heart—I read and reread—this statistic: the average father in America spends seven and one-half minutes a week with his teenage son or daughter—seven and one-half minutes a week. I’m talking about face-to-face relationship. We live in America, where we kind of spawn ’em and pawn ’em. I mean, we have these children, and then we leave it up to other people to raise our children for us. Dave Simmons said, “They deposit their bottle-fed babies in kiddie-care covens and school cells, keep them in Reeboks, straighten their teeth, and call this ‘child raising’.” We let somebody else do it. Friend, you’ve got to cultivate these olive plants.

That’s the reason that I want you to put in your margin by verse 3 “Ephesians chapter 6, verse 4.” Listen to it: *“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”* (Ephesians 6:4) Now, this verse has both a negative and a positive in it. The negative is this—here’s the negative to watch out for: he says, *“Provoke not your children to wrath.”* (Ephesians 6:4) If you

have difficulty with that translation, let me just give it to you in plain English: don't drive 'em nuts. "*Provoke not your children to wrath.*" (Ephesians 6:4) The word *provoke* means "to exasperate." It means "to frustrate." It means "to badger." It means "to wound." It means "to humiliate." And, that's what many dads are doing to the kids, and you can do this two basic ways.

A. Don't Under-Discipline Your Child

Number one: by under-disciplining your child. Proverbs chapter 19, verse 18 says, "*Chasten thy son while there is hope.*" (Proverbs 19:18) Friend, there's coming a time when it'll be too late. "*Chasten thy son while there is hope.*" (Proverbs 19:18) Now, let me tell you how you can under-discipline if you're a dad and really provoke your child: you can under-discipline by just giving in to every demand—that's the easy way—or by making empty threats, not carrying out those threats—by inconsistency in discipline.

Joyce and I haven't been perfect parents, but we've got four wonderful kids. The one thing we've tried to do is to be consistent in our discipline. There are certain things that they know that they know that they know are wrong. Two things in our family we don't tolerate—period: one is dishonesty, and the other is disrespect. We just will not tolerate that. And, any of our kids can get in trouble in a skinny minute with me if they're disrespectful to their mamma. I will not stand for it and should not stand for it. We under-discipline sometimes. When we are so inconsistent, we scream at children. When you scream at your child, do you know what that means? That just simply means you're out of control.

B. Don't Over-Discipline Your Child

You can under-discipline or, of course, you can over-discipline. You show me a father who says, "All right then, pastor, you say you won't put up with this and you won't put up with that; neither will I"—you show me a father who is a leader but not tender—and I'll show you a family that still has problems. And, some of you macho dads—you bully dads—need to listen. When you chasten your child and you do an overkill, down deep in his heart he knows what you're doing is not fair. He may not be able to reason it all out, but he knows it's unfair and he knows that you're getting away with it just because you're bigger than he is and you're stronger than he is. And, he can tell when you're angry and just getting even rather than when you're brokenhearted and disciplining. I'm telling you, dads, if you have all rules and no relationships, you're going to have rebellion, and if you have all relationship and no rules, you're going to have chaos.

But, the Bible says you're "*[not to] provoke...your children to wrath: but [you're to] bring them up in...nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" (Ephesians 6:4) Now, look at that word *nurture* and think about your child as an olive plant. The word *nurture* actually has the idea of cultivation, like you would cultivate an olive plant.

Do you have a garden? I don't have a garden. I'll tell you why I don't have a garden: I don't like gardens—too much weeding, too much hoeing, too much fertilizing, too much watering, too much care. It's tough to have a garden. It's easy for me to buy vegetables. I've got some dear friends who bring me some, and I love 'em. I love these friends who've done that weeding, and that hoeing, and that watering. If you love gardens, I'm proud of you. And, my dear friend, you've got another kind of garden: you've got some olive plants. And, it takes that weeding. It takes that watering. It takes that fertilizing. It takes that cultivating. It takes that discipline. It takes that instruction. It takes that demonstration.

And, there's no way to do it without spelling love "T-I-M-E." I read that other day that if a father does not spend quality time with his daughter, he greatly, greatly increases her opportunities, her proclivities, her chances to be one of two things: either frigid or she's going to be promiscuous. If the father does not give her the love that she deeply desires, she's going to find someone else that is going to give her what her dad really ought to give her—she's looking for a father figure and will become vulnerable—or else she will have a negativism toward men in general. You say, "Well, pastor, I just don't have time." Well, friend, I believe you have time. If you don't have time, take time. You say, "I've got other things to do." Well, duties don't conflict.

Let me show you something that I came across. Los Angeles Dodger baseball player, Orel Hershiser—all you men recognize the name—was interviewed in the Wall Street Journal. And Orel Hershiser, I believe, hit a homerun on the pages of *The Wall Street Journal*. When asked for his strategy of success, here's what he said—and I want you to listen to this: he said (and I quote), "I give my credit to my personal submission to Jesus Christ. Each time I assess my major league career, I ask myself these questions: Am I still married? Are my children happy? And, do they know that their father loves them and is committed to their mother and to them? And, when I'm finished with my baseball career, my most important goal is not to make the hall of fame but to see that my family is successful as the result of my influence." Don't you love that? This great man, wealthy because of his baseball prowess, said, "I'm not trying to get in somebody's hall of fame but in God's hall of fame by raising my family as I ought to raise them." And Orel, I salute you for that.

But, the sad thing is, one week later, in *USA Today*, they were doing a story on another baseball player—his name, Pete Rose. And, they thought they'd find out about the real Pete Rose; and so, they interviewed his daughter, and this is what his daughter said: "He's the worst father in the world. I will never understand why he never had any time for any of us. We really didn't expect anything from him; we just wanted him to like us. Even if I wanted to call my dad, I couldn't. He will not give me his phone number. I have to call his agent and then wait for him to return the call." When they asked Peter

Rose about that, you know how he responded? Here's how he responded: "I don't know what she's complaining about. I bought her a new Mercedes last week and had it sent to her." Two men, two sets of values. I'm telling you, dads, they are like olive plants: they've got to be cultivated; they've got to be cared for.

IV. The Contribution He Leaves

Now, I want you to see not only the children that he leads, but I want you to see, last of all, the contribution that he leaves—the contribution that he leaves.

A. National Security

Look in verses 5 and 6: "*The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion...thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.*" (Psalms 128:5) Show me a generation that has God-fearing, hardworking fathers; men who love their wives; men who lead their children, and I'll show you a nation that is a strong nation. "You'll see the good of Jerusalem." As I told you before, America will not be changed until our families have changed, and our families will not be changed until the fathers are changed. "You'll see the good of Jerusalem." That's a part of the legacy He leaves, is a healthy nation.

B. A Personal Legacy

But oh, I want you to see the last part of it: "*Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.*" (Psalms 128:6) Now, he's talking not only about national security, but he's talking about your personal legacy. "*[You will] see [your] children's children,*" (Psalms 128:6) and the idea's of the children's children living in peace because of the legacy of a godly granddaddy. That means all the more to me because of my six wonderful grandchildren that I love with an indescribable love. "*Thou shalt see thy children's children.*" (Psalms 128:6) What a delight that is!

I had the privilege last week of spending some quality time with Bill and Gloria Gaither. Now, you know that Bill and Gloria Gaither have made, I suppose, a greater impact on Christian music in our generation than any people who live. I mean, they have just written the great, great music that our choir sings, and many of us have grown up on Gaither music. Well, when I was having coffee with Bill, he told me a story that I want to share with you because I thought it so perfectly fits in with what I'm about to say. He said that back there in Alexander, Indiana, when he and Gloria were first married, they were schoolteachers. They weren't in the ministry of music, and they weren't doing concerts and writing music; they were schoolteachers. They didn't have very much money, but they wanted to build a house. They lived in a little town, and they thought, "We need to build a house, and we want to have some acreage. We want about fifteen acres." And so, they drove around town, and they saw fifteen acres out there on the edge of town; and they decided, "We want that fifteen acres."

They asked around and found out who it belonged to, and it belonged to a Mr. Yule, who was a retired banker whose business mostly was acquiring. He didn't get rid of stuff; he just bought it and held it. And, everybody knew that Mr. Yule liked to buy property, but he didn't like to sell property. But, they decided they would go to Mr. Yule and ask Mr. Yule if they could buy that fifteen acres. And, they took their daughter and dressed her up, put a bonnet on her to make her look cute—to be a good little family, you know—and went in to see Mr. Yule and ask him, “Mr. Yule, would you consider selling us that fifteen acres of property out there on the edge of town?” And, Mr. Yule looked at them, and he said, “Well,” he said, “I don't want to sell anything. I'm not interested.” He said, “What is your name, son?” He said, “My name is Gaither.” He said, “Gaither? Was your granddad Rover Gaither?” “Why,” he said, “yes, that's my granddad.” He said, “He was?” He said, “Let me tell you about Grover Gaither: he used to work for me.” He said, “I have never seen a harder working, more faithful, more dedicated man than your granddad, Grover Gaither.” He said, “Son, you came from good stuff.” He said, “Go away. Let me think about it. Come back tomorrow.”

Bill Gaither came back—whether it was tomorrow or a few days, I cannot remember. The old man, Mr. Yule, said, “Well, I've decided to sell the property. How about thirty-five hundred dollars?” Gaither said, “I didn't know whether he meant for the whole thing or an acre, but I said, ‘Well, all right. That'll be fine.’” And, he bought this piece of property, fifteen acres, for thirty-five hundred dollars. It had a little stream through it, and they began to work around the stream. And, they went out there and began to plant trees on that fifteen acres—a tree for one child, a tree for another child. And, they have a son named Benji, and they have the “Benji tree” there, and all of these trees. And, through the years, they have just planted on this fifteen acres, until today it's a very beautiful spot. That was twenty-seven years ago.

And, Bill said to me, “The other day my son Benji, who's now a grown boy—just graduated from college—was going off to do some ministry in the inner city. And, the women were in the house, and Benji and I were just walking around in that beautiful piece of property. And, Benji said to me—he said, ‘Dad, this sure is a pretty place, isn't it?’ I said, ‘Yes, son. It really is a nice place.’” And then, Benji said, “Dad, how did we ever get this place?” And, Bill Gaither said, “Benji, I thought you would never ask. I want to tell you how we got this place. Because of my granddad (your great-granddaddy), who was a faithful man, who was a good man—because of him, son—we're walking around out here today.” My dear friend, that's a beautiful story to me, because I believe that's exactly what this psalm is saying. “*Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon [Jerusalem].*” (Psalms 128:6)

Conclusion

I don't know what kind of home you came from. Maybe you weren't blessed to have a granddaddy like Grover Gaither, or great-granddad. Friend, you can't do anything about your ancestors, but I'm going to tell you one thing: you can do something about your descendants; you can do something about them. You can say, "By the grace of God, I'm going to be a godly daddy. I'm going to see my children's children loving God, serving God, praising God." And, one day, they'll sing, and they'll think of us when they sing, "Faith of our fathers living still."

The need of the hour is fathers who will be God-fearing, hardworking, who will love their wives and lead their children. C.S. Lewis says there are two kinds of people in world—are you listening dads, moms, children? Listen to me—there are two kinds of people in the world. You can take all of the people in the world and just divide them up into these two categories. First of all, there are those who look up to God in humble submission and say to Him, "Thy will be done." That's the greatest, most wonderful thing you can do—just look up to God and say, "God, thy will be done. Save me. Fill me. Use me. I want, dear Lord, to fear you, to follow you with my family. Thy will be done." That's one category of person—those who say to God, "Thy will be done." The other category of persons are those to whom God says as they slip into hell, "Thy will be done"—when God says to them, "All right, have it your way; your will be done," as they go to hell. Friend, *"[God] is...not willing that any should perish."* (2 Peter 3:9) If you die and go to hell, it's because you've refused the will of God and chosen your own will, and God will have to say to you, "Your will be done." I wonder, today, would you like to say to God in heaven, "O God, thy will be done. Lord, I need you; I want you. I need to be saved. I want to become a child of God"?

I want every head bowed and every eye closed—no one stirring, no one looking around, no one moving. If you're already saved, would you begin to pray for those round about you who may not be saved? Maybe you don't know whether they are saved or not; just pray, "Lord, bless the person to my right; bless the person to my left, that person in front of me, that person behind me. O God, right now, if they don't know you, Lord, help them right now, that they might come to know you as their personal Savior and Lord."

My dear friend, I want to tell you that Jesus Christ is knocking at your heart's door today, and He wants to save you. And, He will save you if you would pray a prayer like this: "O God, I know that you love me. I know that you want to save me. Jesus, you died to save me. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe that God raised you from the dead—I believe it—and I know that you paid for my sin debt. And, I open my heart now, and I receive you into my heart as my Lord and Savior. My prayer is that your will be done in my life. Come into my heart. Forgive my sins. Save me, Lord Jesus; save me."

You say, “Pastor, I can’t remember all of that.” Just put it in a short sentence: “Save me, Lord Jesus.”

Father, I pray that many today in this place will receive Christ as their personal Savior and Lord and be born again. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Family Fun

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 24, 1999

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

“Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.”

PSALMS 128:1

Outline

Introduction

I. Family Fun Refreshes

II. Family Fun Repairs

III. Family Fun Remains

Conclusion

Introduction

We are studying and thinking and rejoicing in and about the family. And, we are in a series of Bible studies entitled “Celebrating the Family.” And, everybody ought to have three homes. Everybody needs a church home, everybody needs a family home, and everybody needs a heavenly home. And, Jesus Christ is the key to all three. Today we’re going to be talking about some homemade happiness. We’re going to be talking about “Family Fun.”

Now, we’re going to get serious about having fun today. Take your Bibles and find Psalm 128. We’re going to talk today about some homemade happiness. A home ought to be the dearest place on Earth, the nearest place to that Heaven that we’re talking about. In this particular Psalm, God gives us a description of the ideal family. I did not say the normal family, or the average family—it ought to be normal according to God’s standard—but God does give us the ideal family. Look at it, if you will—Psalm 128: *“Blessed is everyone that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands:”—*now, here’s the phrase; watch it—*“happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:1–6). I say, that is the ideal family.

May I give you a definition of the family? So many times we don’t even know what

we're talking about when we talk about family. The word *family* has been misused and abused, caricatured, and sometimes refused. But, what is a family? A family is an institution ordained of God. It did not come out of the swamps of evolution and immorality, but it is ordained of God, and therefore it is rooted in human nature. God created the family to satisfy the deepest longings of our heart and to give us a means to give and receive love, to propagate the human race, to provide a safe and secure environment in which to nurture, to teach, and to love our children. A family is a God-ordained unit related by marriage, blood, or adoption. Marriage is defined as a lifetime covenant relationship between a man and a woman. Now, sometimes that relationship is severed, and sometimes there is a single parent with children. That also is a family.

That is the ideal family that we've found right here, however, in Psalm 128. And, how does God describe it? Well, first of all, there is a godly husband—verses 1 and 2. Man is the head of the home. God has ordained that. Then, in verse 3, there is a faithful wife. She's like a vine beside the side of the house, fruitful and faithful. And then, in verse 3 there are happy and productive children. They are like green olive plants round about the table. Now, in the Middle East the olive was very valuable and very productive, but it needed to be nurtured and cared for, and that is God's picture of the ideal family. And, God says this is a blessing. Look in verse 4: "*Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD*" (Psalm 128:4). But, we're going to have to admit that the ideal has turned to an ordeal, and a lot of folks are looking for a new deal. Why? This thing of a happy family is often made fun of today and ridiculed today, as, if it ever existed, it can never ever come back; it is but an illusive dream.

Now, I want to talk to you about a particular part of the family. I want to talk to you about some family fun. We've talked about family faith, and family fun. I want to talk to you about some old-fashioned family fun. I want us today to get serious about fun. I want us to learn about laughter, and I want us to see that laughter is a gift from God. Now, you're in Psalm 128—just look in Psalm 126 and verse 2. When God's people got right, notice what it says: "*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them*" (Psalm 126:2).

I would like for your home to be such a happy place that your neighbors who don't know the Lord, your pagan neighbors, if you have some, will look at you and see the laughter and the joy that is in your home, and say of you, "The Lord has done great things for them." And, one of the marks that God has done something great for us is that our mouths are filled with laughter. Now, laughter is a gift from God. Sarah said, in Genesis chapter 21 and verse 6, "*God hath made me to laugh*" (Genesis 21:6). Now, if you're one of those who think that laughter and faith are contradictory, you need to get your Bible out and study your Bible. "*God hath made me to laugh.*" We need to learn

something about family fun. We need to learn how to celebrate humor.

I have a friend named Ken Davis who is a comedian, a godly comedian. He doesn't believe in coarse jokes and making fun of individuals so as to humiliate them, but he makes me laugh. And, here's what Ken Davis said: "Allow laughter to flood your home, and its echoes will last a lifetime. Someone wisely defined humor as a gentle way to acknowledge human frailty. Humor is a way of saying, 'I am not okay, and you are not okay, but that's okay.'" I love that: "I'm not okay, you're not okay, but that's okay." God loves us anyway. People who are secure in their awareness of God's love, and who have experienced His love and forgiveness, are free to laugh. That's good. People who are secure in God's love and awareness of God's love and who've experienced that love and His forgiveness, they're the ones who are free to laugh. Humor should never be used to avoid facing issues, or as a weapon to hurt members of your family, but it should be allowed to flourish as a part of family life. That's what I'm trying to say.

Now, when I'm talking about family fun, I'm not talking about silly mindless frivolity; I'm not talking about irresponsibility; I'm not talking about failing to do what you ought to do because you are careless. As a matter of fact, I've found out that fun and efficiency go together. As a matter of fact, if you learn how to have fun, you will probably be more efficient. And, in my studies for this particular message, I found what I'd already suspected: that people who have an unusual capacity for laughter also have an unusual capacity for seriousness. The two go together. I'll tell you something else that I learned. Laughter, with a well-rounded sense of humor, psychologists tell us, is one of the hallmarks of high intelligence. It is people who have a well-rounded sense of humor that have one of the sure signs of being an intelligent person.

Now, when I'm talking to you about family fun, I'm not talking about merely laughter and games. I include joy, happiness, games, humor, sports, leisure, vacations, meals, parties, celebration, entertainment, and much, much more.

Now, don't get the idea that our Savior that we love, and we've said, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow," don't get the idea that Jesus was some pale, religious, sanctimonious recluse. If you study the life of the Lord Jesus, one of the things that they crucified Him for was that they said He was a winebibber and a glutton (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). Now, He wasn't, but Jesus went to parties. He worked His first miracle at a wedding feast, and there Jesus was the life of the party, and Jesus was a friendly person. He called himself a friend of sinners. I'll tell you something about Jesus. The little children loved Him, the little children loved Him, the little children wanted to come and sit in the lap of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, that ought to tell you something about the Lord Jesus Christ, who was a man of great gladness. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, concerning the Lord Jesus, "Thou hast anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows" (Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:9). Jesus knew joy, and Jesus knew

happiness.

Now, Satan would love to distort things. Of course, there's a time to weep and a time to laugh, but Satan wants to get us out of balance. Satan wants to turn us into grim people. Satan wants to take the joy out of our lives and to distort things. I want to tell you something, friend. Leisure is not a luxury; it is a necessity. You know what the word *leisure* means? The word *leisure* comes from a Latin word which means, "to give permission" and "to be permitted." And so, leisure time is a time you give yourself permission to have without feeling guilty for enjoying it, because you need it, and God wants you to have it. You have to give yourself permission for leisure. There's a lot of fun in you, but you have to give it permission to get out.

And, there are a lot of people who have not learned to give themselves that permission. You must learn to have leisure. And, if you have children, those green olive plants around your table, oh, my dear friend, don't fail to have that fun with your kids while they are kids. You need to throw away your excuses. And, all of us have excuses. "I don't have time." Then you take time. "Well, I'm working for their inheritance." Friend, it would be far better for you to live rich than to die rich. You say, "Well, I'll make it up with the grandkids." Well, they may not even be bringing the grandkids around because of the way that you lived with them. "Well, we're going to Disneyland in August." Friend, that won't do it. I'm saying that you need to put away your excuses. You say, "Well, I have deadlines." You will always have deadlines, but you won't always have a four-year-old. We need to think about it.

The word *leisure* simply means, "to give permission," and it is a biblical thing. Put this verse down—Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and verse 4. The Bible says, "There is a time to weep and there is a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). That's what God says. There's a time to weep; there's a time to laugh. Jesus, in the New Testament, said, in Luke chapter 6, verse 21, "*Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh*" (Luke 6:21). That's what Jesus said. Don't get the idea that you can't be happy and be a Christian. Don't get the idea that God is some sort of a cosmic killjoy, that every time you see somebody having a good time He moves in to break up the party. That's not God. That is not the God of the Bible, and that is not the God of a happy home. And, if you don't learn to put some joy in your home, and some laughter in your home, and some fun in your home, it's going to be a long, hard ride through ulcer gulch. The Bible says there's a time to weep. Yes, there are some things we need to be serious about—deadly serious. The things that break the heart of Jesus ought to break our hearts. But, the things that give Jesus Joy ought to give us joy. And, we ought to enjoy the things of God.

Dr. Vance Havner was a friend who's now in Heaven that many of us have learned so much from and quote so often. Dr. Havner said, "I have no sympathy for those who

say the devil never takes a vacation. I am not following the devil, but the Lord, who said, ‘Come ye yourselves apart and rest a while’” (Mark 6:31). And then, Dr. Havner said, “If you don’t come apart, you will come apart. You will go to pieces.”

You see what are we talking about? There is a time to work. There’s a time to rest. There’s a time to weep. There’s a time to laugh. And, we need some homemade happiness. We need some family fun. And, we as a church are going to try to teach you how not only to have family faith, to handle family finances, but to have some family fun. And, later on in the year we’re going to in very practical ways help you to learn some things to do at home, to do on vacations, to do day by day, to have some homemade happiness. I want to mention three things—three things that family fun will do. Are you ready for them?

I. Family Fun Refreshes

Number one: Family fun refreshes—family fun refreshes. Look in verse 2 of this Psalm: *“For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee”* (Psalm 128:2). Now, we have to work, and sometimes work is difficult. We come in and we eat, however, the labor of our hands, and God refreshes us. Now, work is necessary, but it can’t be all work and no play. You’re in Psalm 128—look over in Psalm 127, verse 2. Look at it. These Psalms are linked together. *“It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep”* (Psalm 127:2). Now, what is he talking about, the man who rises up early and stays up late? He’s talking about the man who’s more interested in his finances than he is his fun. He’s more interested in his labor than he is in his laughter. And, God says that is vanity—that is vanity. There’s a time to work. There’s also a time to rest. And, don’t be so busy. What he’s saying is, “Don’t be so busy making a living that you forget to live.” So many people are doing that. As I’ve already said, it is better to live rich than it is to die rich.

I read a story that deeply touched my heart. A young preacher came to a town that was a mill town. A small church was there. And, the young preacher went to see the owner of the mill to invite the owner of this mill in this mill town who literally owned the town, really, to come to the church, and this is what the man said to the minister. He said, “Young man, you’ve not seen me in church, and you will not see me until my funeral. I own this town and this mill. It is my pot of gold. When I came here as a young immigrant, I heard that in America there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I have found the gold, but, young man, I have lost the rainbow.”

Now, I wonder how many I’m talking to right now, you’re working for that pot of gold and forgetting the rainbow. “It is vain to rise up early, stay up late, eat the bread of sorrows, for he giveth his beloved sleep.” That literally means that He giveth His

beloved in his sleep. As somebody said, “If you’re burning the candle at both ends, you’re not as bright as you think you are”—“you’re not as bright as you think you are.” Life is passing you by. Your children are failing to have the joy and the happiness that God wants you to have with that family fun.

This showed up on the World Wide Web here recently. I don’t know who the author is: “We have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but more narrow viewpoints. We spend more, but have less. We buy more, but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses, and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees, but less common sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get angry too quickly, stay up too late, get too tired, read too seldom, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and lie too often. We have learned how to make a living, but not a life. We’ve added years to life, but not life to years. We’ve built more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication. We have become long on quantity, but short on quality. These are times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, and less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition. These are days of two incomes, with more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes. It’s a time when there’s much in the show window, and nothing in the stock room.”

Think about it. Friend, what does family fun do? Family fun refreshes. Why don’t you say, “Pastor Rogers, by God’s grace we’re going to put some fun in our family. We need some refreshment in our home. We’ve been too grim. We have been too much grinding out this thing called life. But, Jesus came to give us abundant life”?

II. Family Fun Repairs

Now, here’s a second thing that family fun will do. Not only will family fun refresh, but family fun repairs—it repairs. Look again in this Psalm, verse 2: “*For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be,*”—that means it refreshes—“*and it shall be well with thee*” (Psalm 128:2). It will put things back together. “It will be well with thee.”

Did you know that laughter is a medicine, joy is a medicine, happiness is a medicine? Proverbs 17, verse 22—put it in your margin: “*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine...*”—“*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones*” (Proverbs 17:22). If you have a grim and a solemn spirit, it’s going to break your health. It will break the health of an individual, and it will break the health of a family. Put this verse in your margin—Proverbs chapter 12 and verse 25: “*Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad*” (Proverbs 12:25). You need to learn how to give some good words in your house. Heaviness just bows down the heart.

I was reading these verses from Proverbs this past week, read in Proverbs 15, verses 13 through 15: *“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness. All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast”* (Proverbs 15:13–15). I love that. When you have a merry heart, you have a continual feast. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Hamburger Helper or fillet: you have a feast if you have a merry heart. I’ve seen those people with a broken spirit: the zest is gone; the spark is gone; the enthusiasm is gone; the fight is gone. The only thing that is left is the shell of that individual, the shell of that hull.

I’ll tell you, folks, there’s too much stress today—there’s too much stress. Ulcers and high blood pressure, migraine headaches, strokes, and cancer are some of the symptoms of stress. Not all of these are caused by stress, but physicians will tell you we live in a stressed-out society. Do you know what the three biggest drugs that are sold today are? I’m not talking about illicit drugs. I’m talking about over-the-counter, prescribed drugs. Do you know what they are? It’s no coincidence. Number one: the ulcer medication Tagamet. Number two: the tranquilizer Valium. And, number three: the cardiac drug Adderal. Three big ones. That ought to tell you something about where we are as a society.

Now, I’m not saying if you take these drugs that you’re wrong or that you are necessarily a grim person. I’m saying to you that it is a symptom of our society that we are so stressed out. Our attitudes, our lack of joy, our very emotion, control our health. If you don’t think that attitude has a lot to do with it, you think how many times people are too sick to go to work, but seldom are they too sick to take a vacation. Children many times don’t want to go to school, and the reason that these children don’t want to go to school is they’re sick at their stomach. The truth of the matter is they’re sick of school. It’s our emotions that control our physical bodies so often.

I have in my files a story of something that took place in World War II in Germany. There were a lot of orphans, and they performed an experiment. Whether they had any right to do it or not doesn’t matter; the experiment took place. And, they took 100 children and put 50 of them in one group and 50 of them in another group. And, one group of children was given everything that they needed physically: food, bedding, clothing, care. And, they were also given a lot of attention and a lot of love. They took the other 50 children in the orphanage and gave them all of the same physical material benefits, but gave them no human interaction and gave them no love. And, after a year, both groups were tested, and those children who were raised in the orphanage where there was joy and happiness—listen to this—were an average of two inches taller, several pounds heavier. The other group, where there was no love, no happiness, no

personal interaction, had more diseases and more sickness.

Did you know that laughter is a miracle medicine? “*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine*” (Proverbs 17:22). Today people are discovering that. I read in *Executive Digest* that laughter has a profound and instantaneous effect on every organ. It reduces tension; it exercises vital organs. And, this goes on to say that, even if the laughter is forced, it replaces bad emotions and produces its own effect. I said in the introduction to this that laughter is a gift from God. Think about it. Man is the only creature that can do three things. He’s the only one who can weep, he’s the only one who can blush, and he’s the only one who can laugh. That is a gift of God. God made us that way.

There’s a project by some researchers, Gilman and Goodman in New York, and they talked about the effect that laughter can have just to repair, to restore, and I’m going to quote now: “The positive effect that it has on a person’s attitude, coping skills, relationships, and creativity in the way that humor can enhance motivation and morale is backed up, not just by common sense and anecdotes, but by research.” They even have a magazine entitled *Laughing Matters*. It does matter.

You see, laughter has a way of releasing tension, whether it is a broken spirit, broken body, or broken home. We’ve seen it in our home sometimes when there’s tension in the home, and things are tense, if we can just learn to smile, just learn to laugh. Have you found that in your home?

I may have told you about a time we got in the car when our son David, who’s now a missionary, got in the back seat of the car. We started out, and the back window was down, the air conditioning in the automobile was on, and I said, “David, would you put up the window, son?” There was a roaring sound in the back of the car, and so he put up the window. We’re driving along. After a while, I hear that roaring sound again—the window’s down. I said, “David, son, put the window up.” And, he put it up. And, after a while it was down for the third time, and I turned around and I said, “David,”—I can put on that voice; I said—“David, if that window goes down one more time, there’s going to be some serious trouble in this car. Do you understand that, son?” “Yes, Daddy.” So we’re driving along, and friend, I’m telling you, we were going out to have a good time, but the air was just thick. And then, I looked over there on my side, and there were the controls where I could lower his window. We were going along, and I pushed the button, and his window went down one more time. Joyce’s head snapped around, and she said, “David!” And then, everybody realized that Dad had done it. Big laugh—the tension was gone. That’s what laughter will do in a home. We need to have some fun and not to take ourselves all that seriously.

Let me tell you something about raising children. Be firm. Be fair. Be fun. You can just almost put it all just right there. Be firm. Have some rules. Be fair. Be honest. But, be fun. Don’t be an ogre. “*Happy shalt thou be*”: that’s what the Bible says.

III. Family Fun Remains

Now, here's the third and final thing that I want to mention today of many things I could mention. Family fun remains. It will linger; it will echo through your life. Look, if you will, here in the last part of this Psalm, verse 4: *“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:4–6). You know, folks, we're building for our children a museum of memories. We're building for our children and our children's children a museum of memories. I want the memories that my children have and my grandchildren have, I want them to be memories of a happy home, a home that rings with laughter. You see, memories are our landmarks. They keep us from getting lost. Memories bring a sense of security and belonging to a child's life. Memories are anchors of the soul.

What do you remember primarily, those of you who are adults? What do you remember primarily about your home? Well, you may remember many things—sorrows, pains, deprivations, victories, what kind of car your daddy had, what kind of a house you lived in—but I'll tell you the things you enjoy remembering are the fun times, the happy times, that you had at home.

My daddy died not long ago, and we had a family gathering down in Fort Lauderdale, and the kids and the grandkids from all of our family, and there were four of us, and all the Rogers seem to have four or more children, and, man, we had a herd of folks there. I mean, they were all around. We were sitting in my sister's living room, talking about my daddy. You'd have to know my daddy. My daddy never got over being a little boy. He was a man, but he was a man filled with fun. And, we laughed and talked, and laughed and talked, and laughed and laughed. Not a word of remorse, not a word of regret, but just memories of good times, of fun. I told my wife, “You know what I want? I want people to be able to laugh during my funeral. I want my children at my funeral to laugh, as echoes of a good time remain.” You see, friend, family fun remains. It goes on and on and on and on.

I see Virginia Harrison sitting out here. I remember her dear husband, Bill. All of you know Bill Harrison, so full of fun. I remember going to the hospital when Bill Harrison was dying, watching them roll him in the hospital there on that gurney, and him looking up at that man and telling him a funny joke that was rolling him in there, and then telling him about Jesus. I like that. I like people who can smile in the face of death, because they have smiled during life, and know that family fun remains, and it goes on and on and on.

Let me read to you something. We're talking about fun and laughter, but let me read to you something sad. Many of you remember the name Christian Bernard. He was a

South African, a heart surgeon. He created the aortic heart valve and artificial valve. His name was famous, because he did the first heart transplant before heart transplants were common and known. He was a leader; he was on the cutting edge in that area. Dr. Bernard wrote a book—the title of that book: *One Life*. And in the midst of all this great success, in the midst of all that he did, Christian Bernard lost his home and he lost his family. Now, here it is in his own words. Listen to what he said. Quote: “It was a bright April morning when I drove out of Minneapolis.” Now, you see, he had been to Minneapolis to do this work. He literally lived in South Africa, and that’s where his family was. “It was a bright April morning when I drove out of Minneapolis. It seemed like a century since I had first arrived there, a time longer than all the years before it. In New York I put the car on a boat and caught a plane for Cape Town. A northwest wind was blowing when we came over the sea with the waves close below. My wife was there with the children. I’d not written much in the last two months, yet I was unprepared for her greeting: ‘Why did you come back?’ There was no longer a smile in her eyes. ‘Oh, God,’ I thought, ‘I’d made the most terrible mistake of my life.’ ‘Don’t look so surprised,’ she said. ‘We gave you up. We decided you were never coming back.’ ‘But, it was only a little delay.’ ‘I wrote you April 1.’ ‘No, you wrote once to say you weren’t coming home.’ ‘But we were building valves, aortic heart valves,’ I answered. ‘No, you were building a family, that is, until you dumped it in my lap,’ she said bitterly. ‘We have ceased to exist for you.’ I wanted to say I came home because I loved my children, and I thought I loved her. I wanted to, because I felt it, but what could I say now that didn’t sound meaningless? It began to rain; the city was gray under a gray sky. It was winter in Cape Town, but in Minneapolis the trees were a splashy green color. How was it possible to lose a whole springtime?”

Conclusion

Well, I want to say to you, friend, don’t lose the springtime—don’t lose the springtime. “It’s vain”—it’s vain—“to rise up early, to stay up late, to eat the bread of sorrows” (Psalm 127:2). I want to call—listen; give me your attention—I want to call our family, our church family, and your family, to some fun, and I don’t want some long-nosed, hard-hearted grinch to think we’re not supposed to have some fun. Folks, it is our legacy, it is our necessity, and I call you to it. I call you to go back and re-examine where you’ve been putting your emphasis. I ask you, what are your children going to remember at your graveside, as we said last week, talking about family finances.

But, folks, if you’re having fun and laughing your way to Hell, that also is pathetic, because I remind you there’s no fun and games in a Christless grave. And, if you don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what kind of time you have with your children, if you don’t know Jesus, one of these days you’re going to kiss them all goodbye. We’ve

said before that *God wants everybody to have three homes. God wants for you a church home, God wants for you a family home, and God wants for you a heavenly home.* And, Jesus Christ—Jesus, Jesus—is the key to all three. “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord” (Psalm 128:1). Do you know Him? The fear of the Lord is love on its knees. Have you ever bowed your head and humbled your heart and said, Lord Jesus, come into my heart and into my life and save me?

Father: the Leader of the Band

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 31, 1991

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

“Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.”

PSALMS 128:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Character That He Lives
- II. The Contentment That He Learns
- III. The Companion Whom He Loves
- IV. The Children Whom He Leads
 - A. The Effects of a Dropout Dad on His Daughter
 1. Without a Father’s Love, She Will Reject Her Own Attractiveness
 2. Without a Father’s Love, She Will Have an Inordinate Craving for Attention
 3. Without a Father’s Love, She Will Be Given to a Spirit of Rejection
 4. Without a Father’s Love, She Will Seek the Company of Older Men
 5. Without a Father’s Love, She Will Have Difficulty Trusting Her Heavenly Father
 - B. The Effects of a Dropout Dad on His Son
 1. Without a Father’s Love, He Will Be a Macho Man
 2. Without a Father’s Love, He May Seek Masculine Attention
 3. Without a Father’s Love, He May Marry a Dominant Woman
- V. The Contribution That He Leaves

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God’s Word, now, and look at it—Psalm 128. Now, just keep that in mind, and let me tell you, that when Mary Magdalene came to the empty tomb that Easter morning, she saw someone. It was the Lord Jesus. And, she didn’t know it was Jesus; at first, she thought perhaps it was the gardener. And then, He spoke to her; she recognized Him and said, *“Rabboni”*—or—*“Master”* (John 20:16). And, she ran to Him. And, Jesus said to her... And, you’ll find all of this, by the way, in John chapter 20. But, just keep you Bible right there in the Book of Psalms. And, she ran to Him, reached out to touch Him, and He said to her, *“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father...and your Father”* (John 20:17). Now, I’m going to use that just as a springboard on this Easter morning to talk to you about fathers. Right in the middle of the Easter message,

God spoke to Mary Magdalene, out of whom had been cast seven demons. I wonder if she had ever known a father's love. And, Jesus said, "Mary, My Father and your Father..." (John 20:17). What a premium the Bible places on fatherhood. And, we begin this morning a brand new series of sermons and messages that will go for four Sundays on "The Music of Marriage." And, today, the title of the message is, "Father: the Leader of the Band"—"Father: the Leader of the Band."

There's to be harmony in the home. There's to be music and the lilt of laughter. There is to be lullabies, and melodies, and the entire home is to be a symphony of praise. But, I want to tell you, my dear friend, that the father is the leader of the band. I want us to read here what Psalm 128 has to say about fatherhood: "*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel*" (Psalm 128:1–6).

Indeed, dad is the leader of the band. Now fellows, listen to me: it is difficult to be a good man, even more difficult to be a good husband. But, most difficult of all—and I think you would agree—is to be a good dad; and yet, most important of all is to be a good dad. May I tell you that this Psalm tells you how you can be a good dad and a happy dad?

Notice how it begins—"Blessed" (Psalm 128:1). Do you see that? Do you see the word *blessed*? The word *blessed* there, in the Hebrew language, is in the plural. And, I guess that our best translation of the word *blessed* would be "happy." And, it's double. What he's talking to you about is how to have double joy—blessed, blessed; happy, happy. But, my dear friend, if you don't do what's in this Psalm, you're going to have double trouble. So, if you like double joy, if you like to be the kind of a dad that the Bible says that you ought to be and need to be, I want you to tune in, because I'm going to give you from this Psalm five ways that you can be that kind of a dad that you ought to be.

I mean, how are you going to learn? Where is the standard? Are you going to get it from Archie Bunker? I mean, is he the standard? *All in the Family*—maybe. *Sanford and Son*—that's a good example of a good dad, isn't it? Or, maybe some of the reruns of *Father Knows Best* or *My Three Sons*. Oh, my dear friend, the standard has to be the Word of God. Now, I want you to notice five things—five wonderful, wonderful, wonderful things—about the dad who is the leader of the band, who puts music into marriage.

I. The Character That He Lives

First of all, I want you to see the character that he lives—the character that he lives. Notice in verse 1: “*Blessed is every one*”—“doubly happy is every one” that what?—“that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways” (Psalm 128:1). Prime requisite for being a good daddy is to fear God. And, to be happy is to fear God.

Now, how many formulas for happiness do you think would begin this way: “Fear God”? Most people think, “Will happiness come from marriage? Or money? Or materialism? Or fame? Or success? Or fitness?” The Bible says, “Happy is the man that feareth the Lord” (Psalm 128:1). Now, that doesn’t mean there is a dread of God. Oh, no—the fear of God is pure and clean. *The fear of the Lord is just simply love on its knees. The one who loves God the best fears God the most.* And, a good dad is to have a character so that he fears God, and as a result of fearing God, he walks in the way of God. He shows it by the way that he lives.

Now dads, are you listening, dads? There is nothing more important than your integrity. Now, you might fail in a lot of different ways, but oh, if you just simply fear God and live with integrity... You see, you cannot teach what you do not know. And, you cannot come from where you’ve not been; you cannot give what you do not have. You must fear God. You must walk in integrity. What do you want to be remembered for?

I was thinking, as I was preparing this sermon, “What will my children remember me for?” First, I thought, “They would remember my sermons.” Then, I laughed: “I can’t even remember them. They’re not going to remember my sermons.” What are my children going to remember me for? Some office that I was elected to, or the churches that I have pastored? I know, as surely as I am standing here, what my children will remember me for—I pray to God that they will remember me for—is my character—my character. By the way, that’s what your kids are going to remember you for—your character. Do you know what I want my kids to remember me for? I want them to say, “My dad feared God. My dad walked in the ways of God.” That’s what I want to be remembered for.

I remember when our first son was born. Joyce and I were in school. I was working my way through school. And, we were living from hand to mouth—and I mean, it was God’s hand to our mouths. It was so difficult. And, I worked my way through eight years of higher education and had to pay the bills, and God just provided. But, we had planned to have a son while we were married. We had several children while we were going to school, and we planned to have a child; we didn’t plan to have a son. But, any way, it was a son. We just did. We would have been happy with a daughter. We have now five children. We have one little boy in Heaven, and we have two sons and two daughters. But, our first son was named Steve. And, when, that night, when Joyce gave me that elbow—I don’t know why they always come in the middle of the night—but she

said, “Adrian, I think it’s time.” Boy, I’m telling you, I had played football and done some other things, but I was scared to death. My heart went *boom, boom, boom!* And, she said, “Adrian, you’re supposed to call the doctor and tell him that that we’re on our way.”

And, we lived in a little house trailer. Folks, we didn’t have a telephone. We didn’t even have a bathroom. And, in that little house trailer, we had to go to the communal bath there. And so, I went out to the communal hall there to use the phone. It was about 2:00 in the morning. And, it was locked. I said, “O dear God, it can’t be locked. I mean, I’ve got to use the phone.” Now, this is an emergency. I went to my car, and got a tire iron, and pried open the window. And, I said, “Boy, if I get caught doing this, I’m in real trouble. But, I mean, this is an emergency.” And then, I dived into the window, and banged my shins, and fell on the floor, and ran to the phone (and it was a pay phone). I said, “O God.” So, out the window I went, back into the house, looking for a nickel, and then back again, and dialed with nervous fingers, and finally told the doctor—I said, “Doctor, we are on our way.”

I remember waiting out there. I didn’t have any body to wait with me. I was just by myself there. After a while, they came out. They said, “You’ve got a son.” And, I remember seeing my wife and that boy as they wheeled past me and I looked at my own flesh and blood. I went back to that little house trailer, got on my knees, and I prayed like this: I said, “Lord, if I never preach a good sermon, if I never pastor a significant church, if I never have any possessions, that’s not the important thing. O God, I pray that this boy will know that his daddy loves Jesus. I want my children to think that Abraham Lincoln and George Washington were the Jesse James boys compared to their daddy.”

I want them to believe in the God that I fear, and by the way, that son is ministering as a minister of music in Florida this morning, loving God. I have another son that ministered this morning in Spain. I thank God for my two godly daughters who are members of this church, who love the Lord. And, my friend, I want to tell you, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in [the] truth*” (3 John 1:4).

And, I want to tell you something, dads: number one—number one, number one—in being a good dad is the character that he lives: integrity—integrity. My kids know that I have faults; I have a lot of them. And, they could stand up and say, “Dad has faults.” But, I’ll tell you one thing they will do: they’ll say, “My dad is real. My dad is honest. My dad loves God.” I know they would say that. My dear friend, your children need a dad that fears God, a dad that walks with integrity.

II. The Contentment That He Learns

Now, secondly, I want you to see not only the character that he lives, but the contentment that he learns. Look, if you will, in verse 2: “*For thou shalt eat the labour of*

thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee” (Psalm 128:2). Do you see it? Happy. Do you see it? Well, he’s speaking of contentment. He’s talking here about a workingman who goes out and labors. And, no matter what his labor may be, whether he works from the neck up or from the neck down, he is a laboring man. And, he comes home, and he eats the fruit of his labor.

There’s something very wonderful about honest work. There’s something very wonderful about providing for your family, and coming home, and enjoying what God has given. And, God has a way of taking care of the godly. David said in Psalm 37, verse 25: *“have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread”* (Psalm 37:25). And, in Philippians chapter 4, verse 19, the Apostle Paul echoes, *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19)—not necessarily all your desires and all your wants, not your carnal desires, but your needs. You know the Bible says in 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 6: *“But godliness with contentment is great gain”* (1 Timothy 6:6). Do you know the problem with many dads? They’re just simply not content. There’s never enough. He’s making 25,000; he wants to make 35,000—making 35,000; he wants to 50,000. Making 50,000—he wants to make 75,000. Seventy-five thousand—75,000—he wants 150,000. He is never satisfied to just simply come home and be happy with his family. He’s always earning a living and forgetting to live life.

I may have told you about a family—they were going to move. And, this father is one of those typical businessmen. His mind was everywhere except on his family. They were going to move, and the wife said, “Now husband, when you go off to work, don’t forget—when you come back home, the moving van will have come. We’ve moved across town. Don’t forget.” He said, “Well, who do you think I am? Do you think I’d forget we’re moving?” She said, “I know you. You’re going to forget.” He said, “Forget it? I’m going. Don’t worry about me. I’m not going to forget, above all things, that we’ve moved. How stupid do you think that I could be?” Well, he went to work. That evening he drove home to the old address. The door was open. The drapes were gone. The yard was cluttered with papers and so forth—obvious the moving van had been there. He said, “Oh, no, I have forgotten. Oh, you know, how can I face her?” And, he said, “Worst of all, I don’t even know where we have moved.” So, he saw a little boy out there riding on a bicycle. He said, “Son, come here.” He said, “Do you remember the folks who used to live in that house?” He said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Son, do you know where they have moved?” He said, “Oh, daddy, mama said you’d forget where we’d moved.” That’s a little overdrawn, but there are some dads that are just almost getting to that kind of a condition. They are never really satisfied.

Again, Joyce and I—we’ve had some heartaches; we’ve had a lot of heartaches. We had a little boy to die. And, he died one of those crib deaths. Right before that little boy

had died, we had just moved to our first church out of seminary and bought a few hundred dollars worth of furniture—well, our furniture—you could hardly call it “furniture”—while we were going through school. And, we had bought a little couch and a little coffee table. And, I was grateful for it. When that little boy died, I remember coming back to that little house and looking at that furniture. And, when I look at it, my dear friend, it did not even—it would have had to have improved to be counted worthy to be called “junk.” Now, I hope you understand what I’m talking about. It was nice—a little nice piece of furniture. But, I thought, “How absolutely, abjectly worthless is that junk compared to my baby boy—compared my baby boy!” And, I think at that time—I’ve had to remind myself about it from time to time, but I saw at that time—“How absolutely worthless are the things of this world in comparison to the things that really count!” I’m not against having nice things. I want nice things, and I hope you have nice things. But, Joyce and I made up our mind then, and we discussed it with one another and made a vow—that we would never get upset over the loss of anything material and that we would never truly *own* anything. Now, we may have the title to it, and someone may say, “That is yours,” But, we’ve made up our mind that is not ours; we’re only stewards. And, dear friend, a liberty in life is not to own anything.

III. The Companion Whom He Loves

You see, listen—what is an ideal dad? Number one: There is, my dear friend, the character that he lives; and, number two, the contentment that he learns. And then, number three—look at it here: the companion that he loves. Look in verse 3: *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house”*—*“Thy wife...[like] a fruitful vine”* (Psalm 128:3). What does a vine do? Well, a vine just grows up the wall. And, if it’s fruitful, it breaks out in clusters of grapes. And, God describes the wife this way—as a fruitful vine. That means she is a faithful wife because she clings to him, just like a vine clings to a wall. He is her support. And, by the way, a husband is to be to a wife what a wall is to a vine. He is to be the support. He is to be the strength. He is to have that rock-like strength. And, she is to have that tenderness. And, she is to put out her tendrils, and she is to cling to him—to him alone. She is to be a faithful wife, and she is to be a fruitful wife.

Does that characterize your wife? By the way, the next time you criticize your wife’s judgment, remember she married you. A faithful wife clinging to her husband, her strong support, and a fruitful wife—that’s what this verse 3 says (Psalm 128:3). And, by the way, my dear friend, thank God for children. The Bible says... Just look in the Psalm before this one—Psalm 127, verse 3: *“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward”* (Psalm 127:3). And, then Psalm 128, verse 3: *“[And] thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine”* (Psalm 128:3). These two Psalms are put side by side;

they're Psalms on the home. And, what they tell us—oh, my friend, the children are not a burden; children are a blessing.

I have been impressed today that those who mostly should be having children are the ones who are mostly not having children. And, the reason that a lot of our young yuppies don't have children today is they are trying to accumulate things. And, they read all of these things in *Good Housekeeping* and so forth—how much it costs to raise a child, how much it costs to put one in college, and this and that. And friend, it does cost a lot. I mean, you're looking a guy suffering from “mal-tuition.” It does cost a lot. But, let me tell you something: the Bible says that “*children are [a] heritage of the LORD*” (Psalm 127:3). That's your wealth, not your money, not your house, not your car—that's not your wealth. People say, “Well, children make a rich man poor.” No, they make a poor man rich. A rich man can't take his money to Heaven. I'm taking all my children to Heaven. You see, “*children are [the] heritage of the LORD*” (Psalm 127:3).

IV. The Children Whom He Leads

And so, here's a faithful father—not only is the character that he lives, and the contentment that he learns, but the wife that he loves. And, she's like a fruitful vine—a faithful wife and a fruitful wife. And then, number four: the children that he leads—and the children that he leads. Look in verse 3 again: “*thy children like olive plants round about thy table*”—“*children like olive plants*” (Psalm 128:3).

Did you know that the olive is a symbol in the Bible of fruitfulness and righteousness? The psalmist said, “*But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever*” (Psalm 52:8). You want your children to be like green olive trees in the house of God, trusting in the mercy of God. That's what he's talking about. “*Like olive [trees around] thy table*” (Psalm 128:3)—the idea is, here's a venerable olive tree, and around that olive tree are green shoots that are coming up. This olive is just reproducing itself in its children. This is what he is talking about. Did you know that an established olive tree, if it's well-established, people can eat fruit from that tree for 20 generations? An olive tree is slow to grow. It's a thing of beauty, a thing of productivity, a thing of fruitfulness.

Now, let me tell you something, dad; listen to me: your wife is like a vine; your children are like olive plants. Now, what does that tell you? Well, think. Both must be cultivated. That's what it tells you. I mean, they are not like sticks and stones. They're like a vine; they're like olives—like an olive plant. Wise is the dad that understands, therefore, that it is his duty and privilege to cultivate his wife's love and her needs and to cultivate his children and their needs.

Do you know what the curse of today is? It's not juvenile delinquency; it is not a generation gap. I'll tell you, my dear friend, what the curse of today is. It is not primarily

working mothers; it is not the feminist movement. We guys would like to shove the blame away. May I tell you what the 20th Century curse is? It is dropout dads. That's it. It is dropout dads.

A. The Effects of a Dropout Dad on His Daughter

And, if you're an absentee dad, let me tell you the effect that it's going to have on your daughter. Let's just talk about your daughter for a while.

1. Without a Father's Love, She Will Reject Her Own Attractiveness

I'll tell you one thing she will do: if she does not have a dad's love, she's going to reject her own attractiveness. She's going to get the idea, "I'm not pretty." She may even reject her own femininity. "I mean, after all, if I couldn't attract my dad's attention, how could I hope to attract somebody else?"

2. Without a Father's Love, She Will Have an Inordinate Craving for Attention

I'll tell you something else she's going to do: she's going to have an inordinate craving for attention. She's going to love to be held, and she'll never seem to get enough. And, it's going to make her vulnerable to some young man who will gladly give her those embraces in exchange for other pleasures.

3. Without a Father's Love, She Will Be Given to a Spirit of Rejection

I'll tell you what else it's going to do: she is going to be given to a spirit of rejection. And, when she sees any kind of hostility, big or small, any kind of inconsistency in somebody else, she's going to say, "That's rejection. They're rejecting me," because she is going to feel that she is rejected, and it's going to be seen in all of her relationships.

4. Without a Father's Love, She Will Seek the Company of Older Men

I'll tell you something else that's going to happen to her, dad, if you don't spend time with her and cultivate her—your own daughter: she is going to seek the company of older men. She may even marry an older man, because what she is looking for, somehow, is a dad. She may even marry a daddy figure, and this is going to lead to, perhaps, sexual dysfunction, because she can't imagine herself going to bed with her dad.

5. Without a Father's Love, She Will Have Difficulty Trusting Her Heavenly Father

I'll tell you what else is going to happen—this is the saddest of all—she is going to find it difficult to trust her Heavenly Father, because she's going to think of her Heavenly Father in terms of her own father. If you dads only knew how important it is that you spend quality time cultivating that green olive plant that's in your home!

B. The Effects of a Dropout Dad on His Son

But, I'm going to tell you something else. What about the effect a dropout dad has on a

son—an absentee dad on a son? I'll tell you what's going to happen.

1. Without a Father's Love, He Will Be a Macho Man

He is going to be one of these macho men. Now, the reason he's going to turn out to be a macho man is he's trying to hide his insecurity. Almost every one of these macho men, if you scratch them deep enough, are a bundle of insecurity. Who are they kidding? Just scratching—he's so insecure. And, I'll tell you why he's so insecure: he's never known a daddy's love like he ought to know a daddy's love. And, he's going to find himself looking to his mother for a role model. And, if he doesn't turn into a macho man, he's going to turn into a feminine man. There will be a loss of masculinity.

2. Without a Father's Love, He May Seek Masculine Attention

As a matter of fact, he may even seek masculine attention. And, you might be sowing the seeds of homosexual interaction in him. He wants your love, dad; he wants you to hug him and kiss him. If he doesn't understand that kind of love, he may think that sex is love. That's why so many boys are running around with this kind of trouble. He is going to have the same feelings of rejection that a daughter may have.

3. Without a Father's Love, He May Marry a Dominant Woman

And, I'll tell you what else he may do: he's going to marry somebody like mom, another dominant woman. And, she has to be dominant because dad has dropped out. And then, the whole syndrome starts over again.

You know what's the problem with so many dads? I'll tell you very frankly, dear friend: we live in a day where it's easier to make money than it is to be a daddy—now, you listen to me—therefore, we hire professionals to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves.

For example, it used to be that dad would sit in an easy chair and read stories to the children. You don't need to read stories to the children any more; you don't need to read "Jack and the Bean Stalk" or "David and Goliath." Just turn on the television, and there's the Roadrunner, or whatever. I mean, you don't have to do that any more. Right? And now, since you don't have to do that any more, you've got more money. I mean, you've got a professional storyteller. You've got more money—hot dog! You can buy a bigger television. Isn't that wonderful?

I'll tell you what else you can do: you don't have to teach them now, because now we have professional educators. We can send him off to school, and the professionals will educate him. They'll have him every morning from 8:00 to 3:00 in the afternoon, five days a week. And, you can make more money. And, you know what you can do, dad? You can send him to a better school, where professionals will tell him about the birds and the bees. And, they'll have sex education and all of that thing right there. I mean, after all, the professionals will do that for you, dad.

But, I'll tell you what else you can do: why, you won't even have to cut your own grass; you can have a professional come over, and mow the lawn, and take care of the yard. And, your boy won't have to do that. You can free him to run around in the neighborhood and time for him to learn how to play baseball. Dad, if you work hard enough, I'll tell you what else you can do: you won't have to go out there and throw the ball with him at dusk out there on the street. Why, you can let him join one of these clubs, and a professional will teach him how to hold a bat—a professional will teach him how to throw a curve. And, I'll tell you what you can do: you can buy him the best equipment known, because you're making lots of money, dad.

I'll tell you what else: a professional can teach him how to swim. You won't have to go to the lake on Saturdays. You can play golf, and a professional will teach your boy how to swim somewhere down there. Hey, if you get good enough, you can buy him a swimming pool. Wouldn't that be wonderful? And, when he gets to high school and has trouble. You know what you're going to be able to do? Hey, you're going to have enough money to get him a professional counselor. I mean, "nothing but the best for my son," right? Yes, sir, a professional counselor is going to sit down and talk with him with all that money that you've earned.

Time for him to drive—a professional can teach him to drive. But, I'll tell you what you can do, dad: you can buy him a new car. Boy, won't he like that! You won't have to go out and get your fingernails greasy changing spark plugs, working on an old clunker. No, sir. Your boy—he's going to have a nice car, isn't he?

I'll tell you what he needs: he needs a daddy. And, he needs an amateur dad who is better than any professional ever made. That's what he needs. I mean, that your son is to be like a green olive tree—your daughter is to be like a green olive tree—round about your table.

V. The Contribution That He Leaves

One last thing I want you to see—not only the children that he leads, but I want you to see, dear friend, the contribution that he leaves—the contribution that he leaves. Look, if you will, in verses 4 and following: "*Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD*"—oh, what a blessing this is—"*thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel*" (Psalm 128:4–6). Oh, what a blessing that would be—your children's children, your grandchildren, serving the Lord!

You say, "Pastor, I just feel so inadequate." Well, so do I, dear friend. That's the reason I'm glad for the Psalm just above this one—Psalm 127, verse 1—that says, "*Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it*" (Psalm 127:1). You

see, you can't do it. God will do it, and He'll do it in you.

Listen, folks, I don't know what kind of family you came from. I don't know what your background is. There are so many who are sitting here today—you were raised in a home where there was child abuse. You were raised in a home where there was drunkenness. You were raised in a home where there was greed and selfishness. There are many of you sitting here—say, “I'd give anything”—I mean, you're grown people—“If my daddy would just put his arms around my neck and tell me he loves me! I mean, just if my dad would tell me he loves me!” Well, they're supposed to know I love them. The deepest need of your heart is for a dad just to hug you and say, “I accept you. You're good. I approve you.”

But, you don't have a dad like that, and maybe you never will have a dad like that. But, you listen to me, my dear friend: somebody has to break the cycle. You can't do anything about your ancestors, but you can certainly do something about your descendants. I mean, you can say, “Maybe I didn't have that kind of a home, but thank God I have a church, and I have a pastor. And, I've got the Word of God, and I can break the cycle. And, the Bible says in verse 6, I'll see my children's children (Psalm 128:6). That is, I'm going to see the peace of God upon my children's children,” if you'll start in time.

Conclusion

One father said, “If I had it to do all over again, here's what I would do: I'd love my wife more in front of my children. I'd laugh with my children more at our mistakes and our joys. I'd listen more even to the youngest child. I'd be more honest about my own weaknesses and stop pretending perfection. I would pray differently for my children. Instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me. I would do more things with my children. I would be more encouraging and bestow more praise. I would pay more attention to little things, deeds, and words of love and kindness. And finally, if I had it to do all over again, I would share God more intimately with my family. I would use every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day to point them to God.” Dads, if there's going to be the music of marriage, you're going to have to see to it that God has made you the leader of the band.

Let's pray. Heads are bowed. Father God, I've spoken to my own heart now, and Lord, I pray that You will bring this message home—not only to me, but to us. God give us better fathers. And, we thank You, Lord, that we know that You can give us a brand new fresh start in Jesus' name. Amen.

God's Plan for the Man

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 17, 1994

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways."

PSALMS 128:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Real Man and His Faithful Walk
- II. A Real Man and His Fruitful Work
 - A. He Is to Be a Provider
 - B. He Is to Be a Protector
- III. A Real Man and His Family Worship
- IV. A Real Man and His Future Wealth

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 128: "God's Plan for the Man." Now, not everyone who is a male is a man; I mean a real man, a godly man. You can be born a male, but it takes maturity to be a man. You're young only once, but you can be immature forever. I am talking about being a real, masculine, virile, godly, biblical man. And, friend, if there's anything in shortage today, it is men, real men, who will say, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15). And, to you girls who are not yet married, we're talking about family values. And, I hope you'll get your values correct. It's far better to marry a man who is poor, who doesn't have a cent, but who is worth a million, than to marry a man who has a million, and not worth a cent. I'm talking about real men—men of value. You have to develop to be a man.

Somebody was visiting a little village, and he asked one of the people who lived in that village, he said, "Any great men born here?" And, the man said, "No, just babies—just babies." You can be born a male, but you have to grow up to be a man.

Here's a man's Psalm: Psalm 128. Listen to it: "*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of*

Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:1–6).

What is real manliness? What is God's plan for the man? If you get a dishwasher, a refrigerator, a stereo set, or whatever they call them now; if you get one of those things, a CD player, you get a book of instructions. If you get a new automobile, you get a book. God has given us a book. It is the Word of God. And, from the Word of God we're going to find God's plan for the man. We're not going to get it from Tom Brokaw. We're not going to get it from Donald Trump. We're not even going to get it from John Wayne. It may break your heart to know that, but, friend, we're going to have to find out from God's Word what God's plan for the man is.

There is a basic fundamental difference between men and women, and the devil is doing all that he can do to blur that distinction. The Bible says, in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 27, that God made them in the beginning male and female (Genesis 1:27). Now, there are those who are trying to tell us that there is no fundamental difference. And, they're doing that in the name of equality. Men and woman are equal, but they are not the same. Did you understand that? Men and woman are equal, but they are not the same. And, equality of worth is not sameness of function.

Dr. Joyce Brothers—and certainly we wouldn't call her a Bible-thumper, but Dr. Joyce Brothers—says it clearly: "Are men and woman really so different? They are. They really are. I've spent months talking to biologists, neurologists, geneticists, research psychologists and psychologists. What I've discovered is that men are more different from women than I had known. Their bodies are different. Their minds are different. Men are different from the very composition of their blood to the way their brains develop, which means they think and experience life differently from women." She goes on to say, "It has almost become an article of faith in recent years to maintain there are no significant differences between the sexes apart from the most obvious and cherished differences. The fact is there are other and more important differences between the sexes than the male and female reproductive organs."

Now, let me tell you what Dr. Paul Popenoe said. He talks about these distinctions. This is very interesting—listen to this. "Men and women differ in every cell of their bodies. This difference in the chromosome combination is the basic cause of development into maleness and femaleness as the case may be. Women have greater constitutional vitality, perhaps because of this chromosome difference. Normally, she outlives man by three or four years, in the U.S." They call them the weaker sex. They outlive us by 3 or 4 years. And then, Dr. Popenoe says this: "Women's blood contains more water (20% fewer red cells). Since these supply oxygen to the body cells, she tires more easily, is more prone to faint. Her constitutional viability is therefore strictly a long-range matter. When the working day in British factories, under wartime conditions, was

increased from 10 to 12 hours, accidents of women increased 150%, of men, not at all.” Interesting. Why? Because there is a basic, vital, fundamental, psychological, physiological, chemical, chromosomal difference between men and women.

Now, having said all of that—and, remember that God made them in the beginning male and female—I want you to listen what Gloria Steinem, one of the leading feminists in the modern feminist movement said. And, I quote: “We are human beings first, with minor differences from men that apply largely to the act of reproduction. The only functional difference between men and women is the woman’s ability to give birth; therefore a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.” That’s Gloria Steinem. No real basic difference. But God made man, and God made woman. And, God made them different. And, God made them different for a purpose.

Now, look in this Psalm, and we’re going to find out what a real man is: “God’s Plan for the Man.”

I. A Real Man and His Faithful Walk

The very first thing I want you to see: If you’re a real man, you’ll have a faithful walk. “*Blessed is [the man]...*”—“*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways*” (Psalm 128:1). This talks about the pattern that a husband and father is to set before his children. He is to be a worshipping father. He is to be a godly husband. He is to have a personal walk with Almighty God. And, his wife and his children need to see the husband and the father walking with God.

Now, let me tell you why. In the home, the man is a figure, a picture, of Almighty God. He pictures, he figures, God in the home. What did Jesus teach us to call God? Our Father. Now, if you’re a child, and you have a father, then what is your mind going to say? “God is like Daddy”—“God is like Daddy.” We are taught to pray to God, our Father. In the home, the husband represents Almighty God to his children, the Lord Jesus Christ to his wife. Now, the Bible says that God sent His Spirit into our hearts crying, “*Abba, Father*” (Romans 8:15). That means, “Daddy, Father.” You can find that in Romans 8, verse 15. We are to think of God as a father.

And then, the Bible says, in Ephesians 5, verse 22, that wives are to submit to their own husbands as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22). And, he means the Lord Jesus Christ. Mister, the reason that you ought to live such a godly life is that you are modeling before your family what Almighty God is like and what the Lord Jesus Christ is like.

Let me give you another verse. Put this one in your margin—1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 3 through 7. Here’s what the Apostle Paul said: “*But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ;*”—no argument there—“*and the head of the woman is the man...*”—plenty of argument there. Listen to it again: “*But I would have*

you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Now, this verse tells us that, while God the Father and God the Son are co-equal and co-eternal, God the Father is the head of God the Son, and while the husband and the wife are of equal worth, the husband is the head of the wife. And then, Paul says, in verse 7, speaking of the man, *“He is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man”* (1 Corinthians 11:7). He, the man, is the image and glory of God. The woman is the glory of the man. That is, in the home, the man pictures Almighty God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The woman pictures the Church, the bride of Christ.

Now, sir, listen to me. Don't ever get the idea that religion and spirituality is primarily for the woman and the children. God demands more spirituality from the man than the woman. God puts a bigger responsibility on the man than on a woman. And, if your home is not right, you share the primary responsibility; not her, and not the children. You, sir, are the head of the home. And, if you represent God in that home—and, you should—you are to walk in His way.

One of the chief characteristics of the Almighty is faithfulness. One of the chief problems in America today is the unfaithfulness of men—dropout dads and failing fathers. One third of America's children are not living with their natural fathers. Over 15 million kids are growing up in homes without any fathers. Seventy percent of the men in prison grew up without a father. Did you hear that? Seventy percent of the men in prison grew up without a father. We are in a disaster in the United States. Since 1920, the divorce rate has risen 1,420 percent—1,420 percent. And, the boomers—the baby boomers—are divorcing at a rate of twice that of their parents. Somebody needs to stand up and say, “Mister, you are to walk in the way of the Lord.” And, one of the chief attributes of Almighty God is faithfulness.

A child psychologist, Dr. David Elkind, wrote this: “We see more children who show symptoms of stress, headaches, stomach aches, low mood, learning problems. As they get older, many of them feel they've missed an important part of their life. They feel used and abused. My concern is if they don't feel cared about. then they can't ever care about anyone else, let alone themselves. We may be creating a large number of children who are emotional misfits.”

Do you know one of the chief characteristics of God, I want to say again, is faithfulness? And, that includes promise-making and promise-keeping. Our God is a covenant God. God is a faithful God. All of this Bible hangs upon the faithfulness of God, the promises of God. And, sir, when you make a promise, that is an awesome power. Lewis Smedes has said it well: “When a man makes a promise, he creates an island of certainty in a heaving ocean of uncertainty... When you make a promise, you have created a small sanctuary of trust within the jungle of unpredictability.” I want to

say what Stu Weber has said in his excellent book, *Tender Warrior*, fathers and husbands need to learn faithfulness: “Stand by your promises. Never let go, no matter what. When work is crushing your spirit...*don't let it beat you*. When the local church is overwhelmed with pettiness...*stay by it*. When parenting is over your head...*stay at it*. When marriage isn't fun...*stay in it*. When your children let you down...*pick them up*. When your wife goes through a six-month mood swing...*live with it*. When it's fourth and fourteen with no time on the clock...*throw another pass*.” Stay with it. Be the man. Be faithful. He goes on to say, “Understand that the heart of staying power is *sacrifice*—giving oneself up for the good of another. For the ultimate example of staying power, our eyes only have to lock on the Lord Jesus Christ. When He could have turned away from the cross, He stayed on course, setting His face like flint all the way to Calvary. When He could have come down from the cross and sidestepped the suffering, He stayed. When He could have summoned armies of angels to deliver Him and called down divine air strikes on His adversaries, He stayed. He persevered and ‘stayed under’ all the way until that moment came when He could cry out, ‘It is finished!’” God have mercy upon dropout dads and failing fathers. Walk—walk with God.

II. A Real Man and His Fruitful Work

Now, friend, a real man is before the Almighty God a man with a faithful walk. Secondly, not only is he known by his faithful walk, but he is also known by his fruitful work. Look, if you will, in verse 2: “*For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee*” (Psalm 128:2).

A. He Is to Be a Provider

God's plan for the man is to provide for his family. He is to be a provider for the home. Goes all the way back to the Book of Genesis chapter 3 and verse 19: “*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground*” (Genesis 3:19). And, He's speaking to the man.

Now, He's saying it's not going to be easy. And, that, ladies, is why God gave men a tough exterior. And, he's supposed to be tough, because he is the primary breadwinner. God did not make you to be the primary breadwinner. God made you, lady, to be the nurturer. The Bible says, in Titus 2, verse 4, “*That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home*” (Titus 2:4–5). Little children need their mamas. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure that out. God made the man to provide. And, we have a generation today that has obliterated that.

And, I want to say, mister, that provision goes beyond food and clothing and housing. If you think that you can give your kids things and put your wife in a beautiful

house, and you've done your job, you're wrong. You are to provide the emotional and spiritual security of that home. You are not to be only a provider; you are to be a provisionary. That is, to say, "What does my family really need?" Have you ever sat down and written out plans for your family? I have. I have them in my prayer book. I've written out plans for my life and plans for each one of my children. That doesn't mean that I can rule their homes. I cannot. But, I have something that I can pray for. I can have something that I can work towards. I can have something that I can hope for.

B. He Is to Be a Protector

What is God's plan? What is man's fruitful work? He is to be a provider. And, he is to be a protector. Look in verse 3: *"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: and thy children like olive plants round about thy table"* (Psalm 128:3). A man is to have a sense of wellbeing, when his wife and children are dwelling securely. Here's his wife, here's his children, and that is why, again, God made the chromosomal difference in the male and the female. Men tend to be tough and strong. Women tend to be gentle and tender. The man tends toward logic and linear thinking. The woman tends toward emotion and verbal communication. The man tends to be a risk taker, ready to go for it. The woman, on the other hand, prefers security and order. The man in his relationships is more insensitive; the woman, more sensitive. The man looks toward the long haul. The woman is concerned about here and now. The man tends to be more skeptical and suspicious. It's the protector in him. The woman tends to be more believing. It's the nurturer in her.

Now, which is right and which is wrong? They're both right, because that's the way God made them. Gary Smalley said that it's the difference between a butterfly and a buffalo. The woman is like a butterfly. She's beautiful, gentle, fragile. She's very sensitive to things, just like a butterfly is sensitive to the aroma of the flowers and the beauty of the flowers. And, try to catch a butterfly in your hand—you can't do it. You have to use a butterfly net. But, if you took a little pebble and taped the pebble to a butterfly's wings, she couldn't fly; she'd fall. But, take a buffalo, tape a pebble on his back, he won't know it's there. Put those flowers on the ground—he'll walk all over them. The wind—he doesn't feel it. Why? Because he's strong. He can pull a plow and do the work that four or five men would do. Does that mean that he's a brute, because he walks on those flowers? Do you blame him for that? No, that's just the way his nature is. God made him that way, and God made her that way. And, woman, if you're married to a buffalo, thank God for it. That's the way God made him. And, it doesn't mean that he's to be rude and crude and macho—Rambo Jr.—that's not what we're talking about. You can be a man and be tender.

Norman Schwarzkopf, I guess if America has a hero today, I guess it would have to

be Norman Schwarzkopf. I mean, you know in the classic sense of hero. Barbara Walters was interviewing Norman Schwarzkopf. Did you see that? It was an incredible interview. And, in the midst of that interview, talking about the battle and some of the cost of battle, he began to cry. And, Barbara Walters, with a bluntness, looked at him and said, “General, aren’t you afraid to cry?” And, do you know what this man said, this hulk of a man? He said, “Barbara, I’m afraid of a man who can’t cry.”

Our Lord, the man who ran the moneychangers out of the temple, our Lord, who could spend all night on the mountainside with the wild beasts, our Lord, who was not some effeminate sissy who stepped out of a beauty parlor, our Lord, who was a man, was meek and tender and gentle; a man of sorrows and a man of tears and a man of gentleness; a man that little children could come and sit in his lap.

But, God made the man to be the provider. And, God made the man to be the protector. And, this is what this is talking about. *“Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table”* (Psalm 128:2–3).

III. A Real Man and His Family Worship

Now, here’s the third thing I want you to see. Not only his faithful walk, and not only his fruitful work, but I want you to see his family worship—his family worship. Look, if you will, in verses 4 and 5: *“Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life”* (Psalm 128:4–5). He’s a man that seeks God’s blessing and therefore becomes God’s blessing. And, the blessing goes beyond his own family. The blessing goes to the nation. America will never be right until our homes are right. Do you agree with that? And our homes will never be right till the daddies get right. That’s where it is. The daddies, the fathers, are the ones, now, who are to lead their family to worship the Lord.

God has made a man to see the big picture. God has made a man to say, *“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”* (Joshua 24:15). And, the picture here is of a wife like a tender vine and the children like olive plants. And, you know one thing that they both have in common? They need to be cared for. They need to be cultivated. A vine is very fruitful, but it needs support. It needs something to lean upon. So, you’re wife is like a vine by the side of the house. And, the olive trees, your children, you know, in the in the Middle East, if you had olive trees, that’s a source of productivity, a source of wealth. These olive trees, green, productive, beautiful, and stable, but they need to be cultivated.

Sir, how are you to cultivate your olive trees? Put down Ephesians chapter 6 and

verse 4: “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). Negatively, don’t provoke them. That means to exasperate them, to frustrate them, to badger them, to wound them, to humiliate them.

When Josh McDowell was here, he said something I think I shall never forget. He said that rules without relationships make rebellion. Now, if you don’t get anything else out of the message—that’s not mine, that’s Josh’s—but that is real. Rules without relationship will bring rebellion. “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath:*”—and then, the opposite of that provocation is nurture—“*but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” The word for *nurture* here is the idea of tending a garden—just like you would cultivate your olive trees: weeding, watering, fertilizing. It takes discipline, instruction. It takes demonstration. It takes time.

I read this: that the average father spends seven and one-half minutes per week with his teenagers—seven and one-half minutes per week. You say, “Well, I wasn’t there.” That really means you just don’t care. Psychologists tell us that if a father does not spend time with his daughter, her chances of becoming frigid or promiscuous are greatly increased. These are your olive plants. You say, I don’t have time. Duties don’t conflict. Now, friend, you are to cultivate your wife and your sons. Do you know your chief assignment from God concerning your wife, mister, is to make her a more radiantly beautiful Christian? You are the pastor in the home. The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. Now, you say, “Well, we just believe in mutual submission.” That’s a contradiction in terms. Mutual care. Christians in general are to mutually submit, but in the home there’s headship. *Anything with no head is dead, and anything with two heads is a freak.*

I’m telling you, there’s headship in the home. Now, if this bothers the wife, I’ll tell you what it’s due to. One half of it is due to her sin nature, and the other half is due to his sin nature. Her sin nature wants to rebel, and his sin nature wants to rule. God did not make you Little Lord Ha Ha, mister, in the home. God made you to love your wife as Christ loved the Church. And, Christ died for the Church. And, *most women don’t mind being in submission to a man who loves his wife enough to die for her and shows it by the way he lives for her.*

But, there is to be the family worship. There is to be the leader in the home. The great problem in America is not, primarily, rebellious women. The great problem in America is failing men. Now, there are some rebellious women. Hope you’re not married to one of them. But, the great problem is, primarily, men failing to be the men that they ought to be.

IV. A Real Man and His Future Wealth

Now, I want to wrap this up talking not only about the family worship, but a real man and his future wealth—a real man and his future wealth. Look, if you will, please, in verse 6:

“Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel” (Psalm 128:6).

Where is real wealth? I mean, what is wealth? Is it a Mercedes, a BMW? Is it five bedrooms, four baths, a patio, and a pool? I mean, what is wealth? I tell you what wealth is. This past week I was preaching in the Knoxville area. I have two granddaughters who live there, and they came to see me, and we spent some time together. And, I looked at those precious girls, and they love God, and they love me. They really do. They love me, believe it or not. They love me, and I love them—my children’s children. I have two little boys that live here now. They’re going to be moving away soon, but I’ll get to see them—my children’s children. I have a little boy—he’s going to Spain soon with his daddy who’s a missionary—my son’s son. I have a son who is a minister of music in Florida. He’s got a beautiful girl—my son’s daughter. Hey, you’re looking at a rich guy—you’re looking at a rich guy. You’re looking at a man that has something. And, I’ve got something now. I’ve got it not only now—listen; I’ve got it for eternity. All of these kids love Jesus. *“The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:5–6). That’s your future wealth.

You yuppies don’t want to have children so you can have more things. I’ve told you before, children don’t make a rich man poor; they make a poor man rich. The rich man can’t take his money to Heaven. I’m taking my kids to Heaven. I’m taking my grandkids too. We’re going to Heaven. This is our wealth. *“Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”* Psalm 78, verse 5 through 7—listen to this: *“For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments”* (Psalm 78:5–7).

How is our faith to be carried on? From daddies to sons to grandchildren.

When my first boy was born, I was a student in college. He wasn’t a happenstance; he was planned—though thank God for the happenstance; they’re planned also. You just didn’t plan; somebody else did. But, we wanted to begin our family; and, we did. And, God gave us a boy. We named him Steve, after Stephen in the Bible. When I looked at that little red face there when the nurse brought out my son, my own son, my son, I looked at him. I saw my wife for a brief moment, kissed her, and thanked her for going down into the valley of the shadow of death to bring life into the world. And, I looked at her and thanked her for what she did. Then, I went home and got on my

knees, dropped on my knees, and I wept. And, I said, “Oh, God, if I never amount to much, if I fail as a pastor, if I don’t know how to preach, if I am never heard of, oh, God, make me a good daddy—make me a good daddy. Make me a man of God. Make me a man that my children can look up to.” And, I have faults. God knows that I have plenty of them, but I tell you one thing I’ve got: four kids. And, they’ll tell you this: that Daddy is not a phony. He’s not a phony. He loves God.

Conclusion

And, friend, in America today we need some men. It’s time that the church said, “Rise up, O men of God.” It’s a family value.

The Godly Father

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 28, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 128

“Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.”

PSALMS 128:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Character You Are to Live
- II. The Companion You Are to Love
 - A. She Is to Be Fruitful
 - B. She Is to Be Faithful
 - C. She Is Fragile
- III. The Children You Are to Lead
- IV. The Contribution You Will Leave

Conclusion

Introduction

We are going to be brief tonight, but would you find Psalm 128. I am convinced that America will not be changed until America’s families are changed. And, I am convinced that America’s families will not be changed until the dads in America are changed. And, I want to talk to you fathers now. We have talked to the young people, but the key is the father.

The Psalm that I am going to read to you is a Psalm for fathers, and I want you to listen to it: *“Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:1–6).

I wonder if I could have survived in today’s society. I would not have as a youth unless I had known the Lord—unless I knew the Lord. Our young people today are walking through a minefield, and the casualties are everywhere. There are homes that are being blown apart by financial pressures. There are homes that are being destroyed

by immorality and sexual looseness. Do you realize what we are doing in America today? We are calling killing babies—*freedom of choice*. We are calling sodomy an *alternative lifestyle*. And, we are calling adultery *having an affair*. It is a wonder that our kids make it.

So many homes are being disintegrated. It used to be that a man would come home, and throw off his hat and his coat, sit down and give out a sign, and say, “It’s a jungle out there.” The problem now is that when he comes home, it is a jungle; the jungle is on the inside.

Now, God has given us a survival manual, and it begins with the father.

I. The Character You Are to Live

And, first of all, I want you to notice, dad, the character that you are to live. Notice in verse 1—look at it. It says in verse 1, “*Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways*” (Psalm 128:1). He is to be a God-fearing, hardworking, worshiping man of God. He is to fear the Lord. And, I spoke this morning on boldness, but I said this morning that if you would be bold, you must also have fear. When you fear God—truly fear God—then you are bold, and truly bold. What is the fear of God? It is not a cringing dread of God. The fear of God is love on its knees. And, I am convinced that the man who fears God the most loves God the best. And, dads, your children need to see the fear of God in your life.

I will tell there are several things that keep me straight. First of all is the love of God. I love God, but I also fear God. I could not think of stepping outside of His will knowingly, deliberately, because I fear the Lord. I want my children to see this. The Bible says, in Psalm 111, verse 10, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 111:10). And, we need wisdom.

Mister, listen to me. There are four philosophies that saturate the air around us. And, if you are not aware of these philosophies, you are liable to lose your children. First of all, there is humanism. Humanism is just a way of putting man at the center of life rather than God. Man becomes the center and circumference of his life—humanism. Secondly, there is materialism, the belief that happiness consists of things. Thirdly, there is hedonism, which says life is short, so get all of the pleasure that you can. And, fourthly, there is relativism: there is no fixed standard of right or wrong. Now, these things are in the air like a fungus. I want to give them to you again: humanism, materialism, hedonism, and relativism. And, you, as a dad, are going to have to fear the Lord.

II. The Companion You Are to Love

And so, think, first of all, dad, about the character that you are to live. And then, think about the companion that you are to love. Look, if you will, in verse 3 of this same

Psalm. The Bible says here that, *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house”* (Psalm 128:3). Now, God here is using imagery. And, He is saying that a wife, a good wife, is like a vine.

A. She Is to Be Fruitful

She is to be fruitful. That means God wants us to have children. The fruit of the womb is God’s reward.

B. She Is to Be Faithful

She is to be not only fruitful; she is to be faithful. She is there by the side of the house. She does not need to be liberated. To the contrary, she needs to be a part of all that is there in a very special way. Her special place is the home.

C. She Is Fragile

And, not only is she to be fruitful, and not only is she to be faithful; she is fragile. A vine cannot support itself. It has to have something to cling to and something to climb on. And, God wants that to be the stability of a home. And, sir, the best thing you can do—the best thing you can do—for your kids is to love their mother.

I was telling Joyce coming over here, as we were riding along, I said, “Joyce, the most remarkable thing is not love at first sight. The most remarkable thing is to be married for fifty years and still be in love.” That is the miracle of genuine marriage. It is not really our love that holds our marriage together; it is our marriage that holds our love together.

III. The Children You Are to Lead

Now, see the life that you are to live. See the wife, the companion, that you are to love. And then, think of the children that you are to lead. Look again in verse 3: *“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about your table”* (Psalm 128:3). I have been in the Middle East many times. I can tell you that especially in Bible times, and even today, olive plants, olive trees, are extremely valuable. And, we are to look upon children like olive trees: green, productive, beautiful, and stable. The olive tree is very stable.

Now, he says that they are to be round about your table. That means they are to be cared for; they are to be nurtured. Don’t get the idea that if you keep them in braces, and Roebucks, and pay their tuition, that you have done a good job. Now, those things are needful, but what we need to do is to understand that God has given us these youngsters. They are like olive plants, beginning fragile, but they need to grow up into stable, fruitful trees.

Let me give you a verse that I needed as a young father, and I still need as a

grandfather today. Ephesians 6 and verse 4: “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). Now, that is a negative and a positive command. The negative command is this: Don’t provoke your children to wrath. The word *provoke* means, “to exasperate; to frustrate; to badger; to wound; to humiliate.” And, many of us as fathers have done this. And, I must confess that from time to time I have done this.

Now, there are two ways that you can provoke children to wrath. Number one is to under-discipline those children, to fail to obey the Word of God that says, in Proverbs chapter 19, verse 16, “*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying*” (Proverbs 19:16). That is a great verse: “*while there is hope.*” Some of you are going to wait until 180 pounds and sixteen years too late. “*Chasten thy son while there is hope.*” Don’t give in to every demand. Don’t imply threats that you don’t carry them out. Don’t use inconsistent discipline. Don’t scream at the child—you are out of control.

A man was pushing a baby carriage. The baby was crying, and the man was saying, “There, there, Albert. Easy, Albert. That’s okay, Albert. Take it easy. There, there, Albert.” And, a lady saw it and said, “You know, sir, I appreciate the way that you are so kind and sweet to little Albert.” “Oh,” he said, “no, no, no, that is Charles. I am Albert.” “There, there, Albert. Be careful.”

We can under-discipline or we can over-discipline. I believe with the first two children that Joyce and I had I over-disciplined. You know, I just decided I was going to raise perfect children. I found out that wasn’t right. I didn’t make it. And, I pulled the throttle back with the second two. They all love the Lord, and I thank God, but I wish I could go back with the first two again and be more tender. You know, sometimes, when we bully ourselves around with our kids, I think sometimes they think that’s unfair; he is bigger and stronger than I am. And, we are not to provoke our children to wrath.

I have made an observation of fathers. And, I try to find fathers whose children idolize them. I have watched Phil Newberry. I have watched his children. His children worship the ground that he walks on. Do you know why? Do you know what makes a good dad? He is man who is both strong and tender at the same time—strong, but not afraid to hug, to kiss, to love, to speak softly and gently to the children. We don’t need to be violent, whacking at them.

Have you ever seen mothers and dads just kind of whack at kids? Did you ever see them in the K-Mart, or Krogers, or somewhere? The little kid is reaching for cookies, or this thing, or that thing, and dad or mom goes *whack* and yells, “Don’t do that. Don’t do that.” The little kid, he looks like Sugar Ray, you know, trying to defend himself. If you are going to punish them, do it right. Good discipline—don’t provoke them to wrath.

Now, here is the positive command. Look, don’t provoke them to wrath, but bring

them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They are like olive plants. They need to be cultivated. They need to be cared for. I was reading somewhere that a father who doesn't spend time with his daughter will have a daughter that is much more apt to be frigid or promiscuous—if he does not spend time with his daughter. I read something. Brother Phil, you probably have this information. I was grieved when I read it—that the average father spends seven and one-half minutes a week with his teenagers—seven and one-half minutes a week with his teenagers. You say, “Well, Pastor Rogers, I just don't have time.” No, you have time, because duties don't conflict. These children are yours. They are like olive plants round about your table.

IV. The Contribution You Will Leave

Now, I want you to see also the contribution that you will leave if you will do this. Look in verses 5 and 6: *“The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.”* We are going to see good in this nation. If we will put the emphasis one more time upon families, we are going to see the good of the United States. And, also, we are going to see our descendants loving the Lord. *“Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel”* (Psalm 128:5–6).

I get no greater joy than to see my children's children serving the Lord. That is so unique. That is so wonderful. Now, I know that one of these days I am going to die if Jesus doesn't come first. And, Miss Joyce is going to die. And, I wonder what my children will say when they stand around our casket at the funeral. I don't think they are going to say, “Well, Papa wrote a bunch of books.” I hate to say this, but I bet you most of them have not read them. Sincere. I doubt that I have got a child that has read one book that I have written all the way through. Maybe they have; maybe I'll get it after the service. But, if they have, they certainly haven't told me that they have. I'd autograph it, and say, you know, “Thank you.” I don't think they are going to say, “You know, well, he was a good preacher, or he knew certain important people.” That is not what they are going to remember me for. I hope that they will remember my character, my love, my honesty, the reality of Jesus in my life. I can say this: I don't really know whether they read the books or not, but I think I can say this with no fear: our children will tell you that their parents are not phonies, that they are real, that we love Jesus. And, I am so grateful for that kind of a legacy.

Notice again what the Bible says here and at the end of this Psalm: *“Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Jerusalem”* (Psalm 128:6).

Bill Gaither has written some wonderful songs. Joyce and I know Bill and Gloria Gaither, and we have worked together on Bible cruises and so forth. One time I was talking with Bill Gaither, and we were having coffee, and he said, “Adrian, I am going to tell you a story.” He said, “You know, up in Indiana we have a very beautiful place that

we live on. It is about fifteen acres. Gloria and I bought it when we were very young. We were schoolteachers. We wanted a place, sort of a home place. We had a romanticized idea of what we wanted. We didn't have hardly any money, but we drove around our town and we saw this plot of ground. It was beautiful. We thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we just had acreage there that we could have a homestead?" So, he said, "I asked around, who owns that property?" They said, "Oh, well, that property is owned by a man named Mr. Euel. He is one of the biggest landowners around here." Bill said, "Do you think he would sell us a piece of that property at a very reasonable price?" They said, "Naw, Mr. Euel doesn't sell. He is ninety-two years of age. He just won't sell property. He just has it. He won't sell it. You could go ask him."

Bill Gaither said, "I went and talked to the old man. He was ninety-two." He said, "I asked him if he would sell me a piece of property at a reasonable price." He said, "No, son." He said, "I really am not interested in selling any of the property. That's all right, but I just don't want to sell it. By the way, son, what's your name." He said, "Gaither." "Gaither?" "Yes, sir." "What is your first name?" "Bill Gaither." He said, "Are you any relation to Grover Gaither?" "Oh," I said, "yes, sir. That was my grandfather." He said, "Grover was your grandfather?" He said, "That was the finest, most noble, hardest-working man I knew. He was shot through with genuine character. Come back tomorrow and talk to me."

Bill Gaither told me, "I came back the next day." And, he said, "What is it you want?" He said, "Well, sir, we were looking at fifteen acres over there." And, he said, "Son, I am going to sell it to you." And, he sold it to him for almost a pittance. And, they fixed it up and planted and put trees there and everything. It is just like a garden. And, he said, "You know, Adrian," he said, "my son, Benji, was getting ready to leave home. And, we were out there walking around. Benji was going to do some work in the inner city, some mission work. We were just out there having some father-son fellowship. And, we were looking at the spread, that fifteen acres. And, Benji said, "By the way, Dad, how did we ever get this piece of property?" And, Bill said, "Benji, I have been waiting a long time for you to ask that question. It was because of your granddaddy's faithfulness to God."

You will see God's blessing upon your children's children.

Conclusion

I am so glad for this church. I am so glad for the first-graders that we had up here this morning. I am so grateful for these wonderful people up here in the choir. I am so grateful for these noble teens and college students and parents and dads and moms who are saying, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15). And, may God, if Jesus tarries, allow us to see Heaven's blessings upon our children's children. "Blessed is the man that fears the Lord" (Psalm 128:1).

Unity

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: November 4, 1990

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 133

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

PSALMS 133:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. Unity Is Like a Devoted Family
 - A. It Is the Desire of the Savior Because It Is Good
 - B. It Is the Delight of the Saved Because It Is Pleasant
 - C. It Is the Dread of Satan Because It Is Powerful
- II. Unity Is Like a Delightful Fragrance
- III. Unity Is Like a Dewy Field
 - A. Dew Comes Sweetly
 - B. Dew Comes Silently
 - C. Dew Comes Surely

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take your Bibles—find Psalm 133? I want to talk to you tonight about the beauty and the wonderful thing that we call unity, and the title of our study tonight is just simply this: “Unity.” You know, the first deacons were formed, selected, and ordained because there was disunity in the Church, and the devil had tried to divide the early Church. And, because of that disunity, the deacons were selected, appointed, ordained, that the Church would dwell together in unity.

Now, there are three verses here tonight, and I want us to look at them: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”* (Psalms 133:1–3) Three wonderful pictures of unity, and I want you to see them: verse 1 says that unity is like a devoted family; verse 2 says that unity is like a delightful fragrance; verse 3 says that unity is like a dewy field—three wonderful pictures, illustrations, of unity.

I. Unity Is Like a Devoted Family

First of all, look in verse 1: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psalms 133:1) Now, when the Bible uses the word *brethren*, it doesn’t use the word loosely as we do. Sometimes we call someone “brother” because we can’t remember their name: “How are you doing, brother?” But, dear friend, that isn’t the way the Bible uses the term “brother.” A brother in the Bible is the same thing spiritually that a brother in this world is physically, and the word literally means “from the same womb.” Those of us who are saved have a common Father: Jehovah God. We have a common birth: the new birth. And, because of this, we are brethren, and the Bible says that is good: *“Behold, how good...it is...”* (Psalms 133:1)

A. It Is the Desire of the Savior Because It Is Good

Dear friend, do you know what Jesus desires for Bellevue Baptist Church? He desires our unity. Why? Because it is so good. Well, what is so good about it? Did you know the great witness of Bellevue Baptist Church is our unity? Did you know this city beholds this church? And, the thing that the city looks at when it sees Bellevue Baptist Church is that these folks are one mind and one heart. There is an incredible unity in this church, and I don’t take credit for it. It was here before I got here; I entered into it. I told the new members tonight when I met with them, “When I came to Bellevue, I came into an ocean of love. I dived in, and I’m still wet.” There’s a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful unity, and God says it is G-O-O-D—good.

Did you know that one of the greatest tools for evangelism is the unity of the Church? The Lord Jesus prayed in John 17:21—He said, “O Lord, I pray for these that they all might be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” One of the greatest testimonies to the deity of Christ is the unity that we have in Christ. My dear friend, it is the desire of the Savior because it is good.

B. It Is the Delight of the Saved Because It Is Pleasant

It is the delight of the saved because it is pleasant. It is both good and pleasant. Isn’t it wonderful to be a part of a church where the glory is on it? Isn’t it wonderful to come together, and worship together, and to say “amen” together, and to love together, and to laugh together, and to weep together, to sacrifice together, to serve together? I don’t know anything more wonderful than being a part of a New Testament church like this. I love this church. I love what I do. I love coming here and meeting with you. It’s not drudgery; it is a delight. It is good. And oh, *“how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* (Psalms 133:1) There’s nothing better than Christian fellowship. And, you know, we don’t have to know one another’s names to have that fellowship. We don’t have to be intimately acquainted with one another.

The first time I ever went to the Middle East, I went to that garden tomb, and I was so wanting to get there, because they say that's the tomb where Jesus lay. And, I thought, "Could it be possible—could it be possible—that I could walk into that rock-hewed tomb where the body of Jesus lay some two thousand years ago—that tomb, most likely, from which Jesus came and walked out of?" And, there I found myself in that tomb. That room is about as big as this rug that I'm standing on—not quite as big. And, I went in there, and some other people came in there, and people I had not known. There were people from various countries of the world—some white; some black; as I remember, some Asian. We were in that room together. All of us were just awestruck—just awestruck—that we were there. And then, somebody began to sing, "Hallelujah," and it just reverberated through the walls of that rocky tomb: "Hallelujah." And then, somebody else wafted another gospel song. And then, I look at a black woman. She was standing near me, and her chin started to quiver and big tears started down her cheeks. And, she said, "I love Him—I love Him." And, I said, "And I love Him." Somebody else said, "And I love Him." And, we were all there in that tomb, not knowing one another's name but knowing a dear Savior, a risen Lord, who had bound us together. *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Psalms 133:1)

C. **It Is the Dread of Satan Because It Is Powerful**

But, my dear friend, not only is it the desire of the Savior and the delight of the saved; it is the dread of Satan. Satan does not want a church to be unified. I've said it many times: the devil had rather start a church fuss than sell a barrel of whiskey any day. Oh, how he dreads that any people get together, because there's such power in unity. One will chase a thousand. Two will chase ten thousand.

Do you ever read Peanuts in the funny papers? Lucy came into the living room, and Linus was watching television. And, Lucy said, "Change the channel." He looked at her, and he said, "Why should I change the channel?" She said, "I'll give you five reasons," and she held up five fingers. She said, "By themselves, each one of these is nothing particularly significant, but," she said, "when I curl them together like that," she said, "they are a power awesome to behold." Linus said, "What channel do you want me to turn it to?" And then, he looked at his five fingers, and he said, "Why can't you guys get together like that?"

Oh, my dear friend, there's something about you, and you, and you, and you, and you, when we get together in the name of Jesus. What a power it is! *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Psalms 133:1) It is like—my dear friend, it is like—a devoted family.

II. Unity Is Like a Delightful Fragrance

Now, here's another—another illustration: not only like a devoted family, but like a delightful fragrance. Oh, how sweet it is! Look, if you will, in verse 2 now: *“It is like the precious ointment”*—the word *ointment* here means “perfume”—*“like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.”* (Psalms 133:2)

Now, who was Aaron? Well, he was the priest in the Old Testament. And, what does every Old Testament priest illustrate? Well, he's a picture of the Lord Jesus, our great High Priest. And, Aaron is an Old Testament type, picture, illustration, and prophecy of our coming Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *Christ* means “the Anointed One.” They would anoint the Old Testament priests by pouring an ointment made of oil and sweet perfume on his head, and Aaron was anointed that way. Aaron bowed his head, and they took this vial of ointment and they poured it on Aaron's head. And, when they did, it ran over his head and dripped off of his beard. And then, when it dripped off of his beard, it went all the way down to his feet, even to the hem of his garment. And, God says that's a picture of unity.

Now, why is that a picture of unity? He says very clearly and very plainly that it is a picture of unity: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment.”* (Psalms 133:1–2) Well, Aaron not only pictures Jesus, but he also pictures the Church, because we also are a kingdom of priests and we also are anointed or “Christed” (the word *Christos* means “anointed”). And, the Church is anointed. What does that sweet perfume represent? It represents the Holy Spirit of God. Now, God told how to make this anointing substance. God gave—God gave—the recipe in the Old Testament, and God said it should never ever be imitated, never ever be misused—only for a particular purpose. It was made of myrrh. It was made of cinnamon. It was made of sweet calamus. And, it was—it had—an oil base (oil representing the Holy Spirit of God). The exact measurements of this sweet, sweet perfume, this anointing oil—it was all done exactly as God said that it was to be done.

Now, my dear friend, the reason for that is that that represents the Holy Spirit. And, you see, we are the Body of Christ, but it is the Holy Spirit over us that gives us that unity. It is the unity of the Spirit. God says it's like sweet perfume. First of all, it was poured upon his head to show that the mind is to be under the control of the Spirit. And then, it dropped down off the beard onto the heart to show that the emotions are to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. And then, it went on down to the feet to show that the walk and the will is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. What I think, how I feel, where I go, what I do—all of it is to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. We're to be anointed of God. And oh, dear friend, when we meet together as the Body of Christ and God pours that oil upon our heads, upon our hearts, upon our feet, to have the mind of

Christ, to have the heart of Christ, to do the work of Christ, what a unity there is! It's not just unison. I'm not talking about unison. Dear friend, I am talking about unity. I am not just simply talking about uniformity. Uniformity comes from pressure without. Unity comes by life from within. Not just union, but unity—it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, had you been around Aaron when that perfume was poured on him, you would have smelled it. It would have been so sweet smelling, and it would rise to God as sweet perfume. And, everybody around him would smell it. Now, my dear friend, symbolically, when the guests and visitors come to Bellevue Baptist Church, there is to be the aroma of unity in this place there just to simply to say it's just good in here—it's just good in here. My dear friend, unity is like a devoted family, where we are brothers and we dwell together. It is like a delightful fragrance. It is the Holy Spirit of God upon the head, the heart, the hands, the feet that binds us together.

III. Unity Is Like a Dewy Field

But, not only is it like a devoted family, not only is it like a delightful fragrance, but it's also like a dewy field. Look, if you will, in verse 3: *“As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”* (Psalms 133:1) In the Old Testament times, most of the farming in Israel was dry farming. That is, they depended upon the dew to water the fields. I've traveled in Israel, I guess fourteen or fifteen—maybe more—times. I don't even remember now how many times I've been there. I know that part of the country in some ways better than I know the environs around here. And, I've talked to the guides so many times, and they would say, “You see that field? You see that field? You see that field? That's dry farming.” The only way that those crops get watered is by the dew. But, there's something about the atmosphere in the Middle East that causes the dew to distill and water and give life.

Now, God says that unity in the Church is like a dew-drenched field—like a dewy field. Let me talk to you a little bit about dew. What do dew do? What—what—does dew do?

A. Dew Comes Sweetly

How does it come, first of all? Well, it comes so sweetly. Have you ever gotten up in the morning and walked out as the sun is coming up and you see the dewdrops on the grass? And, as the sun comes over the hills and shines on the grass, it's like a billion diamonds just sparkling. Everything is so wet. It comes sweetly.

B. Dew Comes Silently

But, my dear friend, it comes silently. The dew doesn't blow a trumpet. It doesn't make a lot of noise. It doesn't come with a bang. It just distills when conditions are right.

C. Dew Comes Surely

And, my dear friend, it comes surely. You know, you can't make it come, and you can't stop it from coming. Sweetly, silently, surely the dew comes. And, dear friend, when it is there, if you go into the field, you're going to come away wet, and God says fellowship is like that—unity is like that. You can't make it happen. You can't ordain it. You can't organize it. You can't force it. But, my dear friend, it is necessary to the life and the fruitfulness of the Church. And, when conditions are right, it just distills. And, anybody in the field is going to come away wet.

I've talked to so many people, and they say, "You know, we'd made up our mind we weren't going to join Bellevue Church. I mean, we were going to go over there out of curiosity, but we weren't going to join Bellevue Baptist Church. We made up our mind, number one, it's too big, and, number two, it's too far to drive." I heard that so many times—"too big, too far to drive, especially when we were downtown." "But," they said, "you know, we went, and we decided we'd go back. We decided we'd go back again, and we just decided that's where God wants us." Do you know why? Not because of a program, but because of a Spirit. And, not the Bellevue spirit—because we don't have a monopoly on it; other churches have it, too—but people are here because they just went into the field and came away wet. I mean, there's just the dew of Hermon. Hermon is that snowcapped mountain that rises up above the Jezreel Valley there.

Conclusion

And, that's what this wonderful, wonderful fellowship is. Friend, it's like a devoted family. It's like a delightful fragrance. It's like a dewy field. And, all of these things are wonderful. How great when a family gets together! How wonderful when the air is filled with sweet perfume, which is the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit. And, how grand when there is that glorious wetness, that fertility, that fruitfulness that comes when brethren dwell together in unity! That's what I want for our church. And, new deacons, that's why you're being ordained—is to help provide, protect, and preserve the unity of the church.

One last word and I'll be finished. In verse 3, I want you to see something: "*As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon*"—watch this—"*the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*" (Psalms 133:3) If you know anything about the Bible, you know it's on Mount Zion that Jesus died. It's all possible because our dear Savior commanded the blessing there through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank God for Mount Zion that binds us together.

Unity in the Church

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: April 24, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 133

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

PSALMS 133:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Beauty of Unity
 - A. It Is the Desire of the Savior
 - B. It Is the Delight of the Saints
 - C. It Is the Dread of Satan
- II. The Basis of Unity
 - A. Our Common Birth
 - B. Our Common Body
 - C. Our Common Blessing
 - 1. A Genuine Anointing
 - 2. A Generous Anointing
 - 3. A Gracious Anointing
- III. The Blessing of Unity
 - A. How Does Dew Come?
 - 1. Dew Comes Sweetly
 - 2. Dew Comes Secretly
 - 3. Dew Comes Silently
 - 4. Dew Comes Surely
 - B. What Does Dew Do?
 - C. Where Does Dew Go?

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s precious Word tonight and turn with me, please, to Psalm 133? It’s a short Psalm—only three verses—but what a magnificent message it has for us tonight! It speaks of unity in the Body of Christ. Let’s look at that Psalm, and let me read it for you: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD*

commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psalm 133:1–3). Bellevue Baptist Church is a great church—not great because she's big—perhaps big because she's great—but a great church because she has a Great Commission, she has a great Lord, she has a great love, and she therefore has a great unity. And, our church will continue to be great to the degree that we continue to be unified in our Lord, around His Word, and by doing His will, loving one another.

I. The Beauty of Unity

I want us to think tonight about unity in the Church. And, the very first thing I want us to think about is what I want to call the beauty of unity—the beauty of unity. Notice what our Lord says in verse 1. He says, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Psalm 133:1). What our Lord says is, "Look at that, would you? Behold. Look. Observe." What our Lord is saying is, "There is something that is beautiful that I want you to behold, something that I want you to see." Why is unity so beautiful? Well, I want to mention three reasons.

A. It Is the Desire of the Savior

First of all, it's beautiful, because it is the desire of the Savior. Did you know that the Lord Jesus Christ is praying tonight for the Church? Do you know what He's praying? We have the model for that prayer in John chapter 17 and verse 21. Jesus prayed this: *"that...all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one"*—one—*"in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"* (John 17:21).

Now, my dear friend, the Bible says it's good *"for brethren to dwell together in unity"* (Psalm 133:1). Jesus said when we're one, unbelievers will become believers. Did you know that one of the greatest advertisements we have for the Lord Jesus Christ is our unity in Christ? When an unsaved man comes into this church, he says, "There's something different about these people; there's a oneness here, there's a unity here, there's a cohesion." And, that oneness, that unity, that cohesion, is a witness to an unsaved man that Jesus Christ is real. And so, it is beautiful because it's the desire of the Savior. The Lord Jesus desires us to be one.

I'm a dad. I've got four children. Raising kids is a task. I heard about a little Willie who, I hate to tell, pushed his sister into the well. And, mother said, as she's drawing water, "My, it's hard to raise a daughter." And, it's hard to raise children in this day and this age. But, I can remember when our children were coming up, sometimes they would get in scraps and fights. Now, I know that yours never did that. But, we'd go somewhere, and one of them would say, "Mother, he's on our side of the car," and, you know, they'd draw a line through the middle of the backseat and all of that. Do you go through that kind of stuff? And, I tell you, when the children are fussing, nothing is right

in the house. But, there have been other times—and, more lately, thank God—when our children have gotten more mature: I see them hug one another and love one another and compliment one another. Boy, that's such a joy in my heart to see my kids love one another. Really, I don't think I have any greater joy on this earth than to be with my family when they're loving one another. Are you the same way? Isn't that wonderful? When brethren are dwelling together in unity, how sweet that is, how wonderful that is, what a blessing that is to God! It is the desire of the Savior.

B. It Is the Delight of the Saints

But, not only is it the desire of the Savior; I want to tell you it's beautiful, because it's the delight of the saints. See, it says "*how good*" it is, and then, "*how pleasant it is*" (Psalm 133:1). There's nothing sweeter on this earth than Christian fellowship—nothing—to be a part of the family of God. When you take that family fellowship that I just described in our homes and then just expand it to where you have brothers and sisters in Christ, we meet here, and that's what our church ought to be. It ought to be a family fellowship.

Now, there are some people who want us to be more dignified than we are here at Bellevue. Every now and then, somebody, you know, they think we're not dignified enough. They don't know the difference between dignity and *rigor mortis*. They want us to be like some churches I know—you know, how tedious and tasteless are the hours. And, I, you know, I've heard—I've actually heard—people just kind of calm folks down when they come into the church and kind of chatter. I don't like that, folks. I don't like that calm stuff, that spooky stuff. Friend, let me tell you what I do like. I like to come out, and when I walk out on the platform, if the service hasn't started yet, I like to hear people chattering like sparrows in a tree. Do you know why? Because we're meeting our brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a family; it's a home. We're having a homecoming; we're having a good time. There's nothing wrong with that. "*How good and how pleasant it is!*" (Psalm 133:1).

Now, when we begin to sing or preach, it's time to get quiet, and it's time to have reverence. I'm not saying that it has to be a three-ring circus all the time, but I am saying this, folks: there ought to be that joy, there ought to be that freedom, there ought to be that conviviality. It's good—it's pleasant—"*for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psalm 133:1) and to have that fellowship that belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. It Is the Dread of Satan

My friend, it is the desire of the Savior. It is the delight of the saints. And, I tell you something else that makes it beautiful: It's the dread of Satan. Satan does not like for God's people to be together, and I'll tell you why: because when we're together, there is an awesome power.

Do you ever read Peanuts in the funny paper? One time, Lucy came in, and Linus

was watching television. He's lying there watching television, and Lucy says, "Change the channel." He says, "Give me a good reason." She says, "I'll give you five of them," and she held up her five fingers; and then, she said, "Individually, they're not much, but," she said, "when I curl them together like this," she said, "they are a power awesome to behold." He said, "What channel do you want?" Then, he looked at his fingers and said, "Why can't you guys get together like that?" Well, I want to tell you, when God's people get together, there is a power that is awesome to behold, and the devil doesn't like it.

That's the reason the Bible says that the devil loves to "[sow] discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19). But, the Bible says, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1). And so, we think of the beauty of unity. It's so beautiful that God says, "Look at that. Behold it."

II. The Basis of Unity

Now, I want to speak not only about the beauty of unity, but I want to talk to you about the basis of unity. What is the basis of our unity? Well, I thought about it, as I pondered on this Psalm, and I see, really, three things that are the basis of our unity.

A. Our Common Birth

Number one: our common birth. Notice what it says: "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1). Brothers are those who have a common birth. We have a common Father; and, therefore, we have a common family. And, that's what makes us people that are to have unity.

Now, what is unity? It's not unison—don't ever mistake unity for unison. Now, the choir sang tonight an opening number a cappella, and they sang—not in unison. They sang the same song, but they sang different parts; and that's what made it so beautiful. We all don't have to sound the same note. As a matter of fact, God puts different members in the Body, and we don't have to be a church full of clones to have unity, thank God.

Now, it's not uniformity. Do you know the difference between unity and uniformity? Uniformity comes from pressure from without; unity comes from life within. See, not everybody being squeezed into the same mold. It's not even, unity and union are not the same. You can be in union and not have unity—you can. You can be members of the same church and not have unity. Somebody said, "Putting all of the corpses in one graveyard won't cause a resurrection." It's not union; it's unity that comes by life.

And, where does that life come from? Well, we're made partakers of the divine Spirit. We have been born again. We are brothers—brothers. We've come from the same womb of grace. We have been born again. We are sisters. We are part of the family of

God. And so, where does our unity come from? First of all, we have a common birth.

B. Our Common Body

But then, God expands it a little further. Not only do we have a common birth, but we have a common Body. Notice verse 2. God says this unity *“is like the precious ointment upon the head,”*—well, what head? Well, let’s continue to read—*“that ran down upon the beard,”*—what beard?—*“even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments”* (Psalm 133:2).

Now, who was Aaron? Aaron was the high priest in the Old Testament. And, when the Bible speaks of this anointing that was on his head, as we’re going to see in a moment, that speaks of the Holy Spirit, because the anointing of oil in the Old Testament is emblematic and symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Well, who is Aaron emblematic of? What does he represent? He represents the Lord Jesus. Every priest in the Old Testament is a picture and a type and a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our great High Priest. And, Aaron, in the Old Testament, is a counterpart and a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, the body of Aaron really speaks of the Body of Christ. And, as we’re going to see in a moment, we are members of that Body, and our unity is found in being members of that one Body.

Now, the Bible makes it very plain that that’s a reason for unity. Let me give it to you from the Word of God. First Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12: *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ”*—and, Christ is pictured right here in verse 2. *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

Now, what is God saying? Because we have a common birth, we have one Spirit; but, because we are members of Jesus, we’re members of one Body. Did you know that the Bible never uses the word *saint* in the singular, that it’s always *saints*? Did you know that? You never find the word *saint* in the Bible; it’s always *saints*, because we are in it together. We are members of one Body. We’ve been baptized by the Holy Spirit in one Body.

That’s the reason you cannot function for Jesus apart from the Church as you ought. Now, we have a lot of ministries that are not united with the Church, the Body of Christ. In my estimation, there’s something wrong with them. You cannot function as a lone ranger Christian apart from the Body of Christ; or, at least, you can’t function as you ought.

As a matter of fact, it’s grotesque. Now, my hand is functioning because it’s a part of my body. I trust there’s nothing really offensive about that hand. Does that hand bother you? Huh? Bother any of you? Suppose I were to chop it off and lay it out here on the

communion table. Would it bother you then? Yeah. Would it be grotesque then? If I were to just chop it off and sever it from my body and just lay it out there, some of you would regurgitate just to see; others would faint. You walk in, open a box, and inside there's a hand—you pass out. Did you see my hand there? Doesn't bother you? As a matter of fact, it can't function apart from my body. I want you to understand, dear friend, that the Bible says we are "*members one of another*" (Romans 12:5). It's only as you're in the Body that you can function as you ought. And, by the way, it's only in the body that you see all of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the reason we need to come to church: because as we're here together, united together, we see the Body as our Lord intended our Body to be.

The Body is to be coordinated; we're to function with unction together. If my ministry causes problems for your ministry, or your ministry causes problems for my ministry, either I'm doing something wrong, or you're doing something wrong, or we're both doing something wrong. The body is to function not necessarily in unison, but it is to function in coordination.

C. Our Common Blessing

Now, what is the basis for our unity? Well, number one: We have a common birth; we're brethren. Number two: We're in a common Body. Aaron's body pictures that. But, number three—and oh, I love this: We have a common blessing. Notice what he says here: that this unity "*is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments*" (Psalm 133:2).

Now, what is the precious ointment? That is a special ointment that God told the people how to make in the Old Testament. And then, God said, "See that you make it according to the recipe."

1. A Genuine Anointing

And then, God said it is never to be imitated. This ointment was made of myrrh; it was made of cinnamon; it was made of sweet calamus. God told exactly the amounts and measurements to put in this ointment, and then God told the amount of oil to mix into this ointment. It was called the *anointing oil*, and God said, "Don't imitate it. It is to be a genuine anointing—a genuine anointing. It is not to be imitated in any way." Let me tell you something, folks. It speaks of the anointing of the Holy Ghost of God. And, we're not to take any substitutes; we're to have the real thing.

2. A Generous Anointing

But, not only is it a genuine anointing; it is a generous anointing. Notice—notice—how this anointing was on Aaron's head. And, remember that Aaron speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was poured upon his head to such a degree that it ran down off of his head onto his beard, and then it dripped off of his beard, and it went all the way down to

the hem of his garment. That is, when the head was anointed, the body was anointed.

Now, what does that tell us? That means that the anointing that was upon the Lord Jesus Christ is to be upon His Body, the Church; the anointing upon the head so that we have the mind of Christ, then the anointing upon the heart. Where did it drip off the beard? Right there at the heart. So, not only do we have the mind of Christ; we have the emotion of Christ: to love. And then, the anointing goes all the way down to the feet, the hem of the garment: the will of Christ. You see, the mind, the emotion, and the will; to think, to know the Word of Christ, to express the worship of Christ, to do the will of Christ—this anointing, this generous anointing. The Bible says that “[He gives] not the [Holy] Spirit by measure” (John 3:34). What does that mean? It means He doesn’t hold back. The Bible speaks of the anointing on the day of Pentecost as an *outpouring*. God pours out His Spirit.

3. A Gracious Anointing

It was a genuine anointing. It was a generous anointing. And, oh, it was a gracious anointing. When Aaron would come near, you’d smell the myrrh, you would smell the frankincense, you would smell the cinnamon—a sweet smelling fragrance. That’s what the Holy Spirit of God is to be upon His Church. That oil of God’s Spirit is to be on us every time we meet. I can smell it in the air tonight. I am talking spiritually now, as God’s people meet together. “*How good and how pleasant it is*” (Psalm 133:1). That means it’s pleasant; it’s like the precious anointment. That’s what he means. It smells good spiritually.

How wonderful to be in that kind of a fellowship! You see, look. We, my dear friend, have this unity. Why? Because we have a common birth—we’re brothers; we have a common Body—we’re in the Body of Christ; and we have a common blessing—it’s like the precious ointment, the Holy Spirit of God, poured out upon His Church. And, it is the Holy Spirit that makes us one. That’s the reason we sing, “We are one in the Spirit. We’re one in the Lord.”

III. The Blessing of Unity

Well, now, let’s go on and move on a little bit, and talk not only about the beauty of unity, and the basis of unity, but think with me for just a few moments about the blessing of unity. Look in verse 3. Now, he speaks of the blessing of this unity, and he says, “[It’s like] the dew of Hermon”—now, Hermon is that great mountain there in that north of the land of Israel. Those of you who have traveled there with us, you’ve gone up to the north and you’ve seen Mount Hermon. Many times, we’ve seen it snowcapped, sitting up there. It says—“*the dew of Hermon...that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore*” (Psalm 133:3). Now, it’s like the dew of Hermon, but it’s like the dew of Hermon that descended upon Mount

Zion.

A. How Does Dew Come?

Now, God says that this unity is like dew. Have you ever thought about dew? I spent all this last week thinking about dew, and I've asked myself, "What do dew do?" I've been thinking about that: Why does he say that that this unity is like dew? I've even studied a little bit about dew.

1. Dew Comes Sweetly

And, I've thought first of all, how does dew come? Well, it comes sweetly. When you get up in the morning, and you go out early in the morning, and the dew is all over the grass, it sparkles like a million diamonds. Everything seems so soft and green, just so velvety, as the dew is all over the ground. It's fresh every morning; it's not stale. It comes sweetly.

2. Dew Comes Secretly

And then, you know, it comes secretly—kind of mysteriously. Does the dew come up, or does the dew come down? Where does the dew come from? Well, it's actually in the air, but it distills when conditions are just right, when it reaches what we call the *dew point*. And then, that dew just distills.

3. Dew Comes Silently

And, you know, it comes silently. It doesn't come with a bang. It doesn't come with a thunder. It doesn't come with the flashing of the lightning like a thunderstorm. It just distills in the air, and it's there upon the ground. And, you know, really, unity is like that. You don't work it up. It doesn't come with cheerleader enthusiasm. You can't enforce it. You can't make it come. Haven't you been around when God's dew just distills around the congregation? Haven't you? I mean, when God's dew just distills on a prayer meeting? I mean, when, like the freshness of the morning just out of the atmosphere, when the dew point is reached.

4. Dew Comes Surely

It comes so sweetly. It comes so secretly. It comes so silently. Oh, but it comes surely. When conditions are right, you can't stop it. And, a person in the field is going to come away wet. That, my friend, is what God says unity is like.

B. What Does Dew Do?

How does it come? What does it do? Did you know when this was written—and even today—much of the farming in the land of Israel is what we call *dry farming*—not by irrigation, but *dry farming*? I've asked guides over there. We've talked about the matter of dew when I've been traveling up and down. And, they've said to me, "We are dependent upon the dew." I said, "Can there possibly come enough dew? You don't

have rain. You don't have irrigation." And, the guide said to me, "The dew is so great in this area that the dew alone is enough to grow certain crops." And, the farmers are dependent on that dew.

You see, what does it do? It brings fruitfulness. Friend, I believe with all of my heart that we're going to see souls saved, and we're going to see the church grow, when we have that fellowship, when the dew of Hermon and the dew of Zion is upon the Church.

C. Where Does Dew Go?

I was thinking about it: not only what does it do, how does it come, but where does it go? You know, when the sun arises, the dew goes home. You think about it, folks. One of these days, the Sun of righteousness, the Lord Jesus, will come with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2), as Diane sang a little while ago. And, when the Lord Jesus comes, the dew is going to say, "Bye, bye. The Son is coming, and I am going home."

Conclusion

And, friend, when we do that, when we're caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air, we will be infinitely glad that we pleased Him. And, the thing I think that will please Him more than anything else is for brethren to dwell together in unity, that the world might believe.

Believers in Babylon

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: May 8, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 137:1–4

*“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”*

PSALMS 137:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian
- II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian
- III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian
- IV. The Stolen Melody of a Captured Christian
 - A. Suffering Can't Steal Your Song
 - B. Sorrow Can't Steal Your Song
 - C. Sin Can Take Your Song

Introduction

Take God's precious Word tonight, and open it, if you will, to Psalm 137. And, in just a moment, we are going to look at the first four verses of this significant Psalm. But, before we look at it, I want to give you the background for it, so it will make more sense to you. See, what happened was this: God had a people called *His people*, the Jewish people, and God gave them three significant things: God gave them a land, God gave them a law, and God gave them the Lord—three things they had. Now, let me tell you what they did with those three things: when they had the land, they defiled the land; when they had a law, they defied the law; and when they had a Lord, they denied the Lord. And, because of this, they were carried away by the King of Babylon, whose name was Nebuchadnezzar, and they were carried away captive into the land of Babylon.

Now, this Psalm has the background of someone in the land of Babylon, and they are talking about what it is like to live in Babylon, what it is like to be a child of God in captivity, an expatriate living in a strange land. Now, read with me the Psalm: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion...”*—now, *Zion* is God's name for the city of Jerusalem, the Holy Hill of God—*“when we remembered [Jerusalem] Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that*

wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” And then, here comes the plaintive question: *“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?”* (Psalm 137:1–4).

Tonight I want to talk to you about the tragedy of Christians in exile, the tragedy of believers in Babylon. Now, you say, “Pastor, what do you mean by that? I don’t see anything here about Christians.” Well, I think if we look at it a little bit, we are going to find that it refers to God’s people. In the Old Testament, we call them the *saints of God*, the *children of God*. In the New Testament, we call them the *saints of God who are Christians*, but the application is the same.

Now, let me tell you what *Babylon* means. Do you know what *Babylon* means? It means, “confusion.” The name literally means, “confusion.” And, Babylon stands for the world: it stands for the world with its vanity; it stands for the world with its vileness; it stands for the world with its vexation.

Now, there are two major cities in Scripture: one is Babylon, the hellish city; the other is Jerusalem, the holy city. One stands for confusion, and one stands for peace. *Jerusalem* literally means, “the city of peace.” *Babylon* literally means, “confusion.” And so, Jerusalem, or Zion, stands for the Kingdom of God with its salvation, with its saints, and with its songs. Babylon, as I say, stands for confusion. It stands for the world with its vanity, its vileness, and its vexation. This Psalm is a picture—a sad picture—of the people of God who have been taken captive and who have lost their joy and lost their song. And, they finally say, *“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?”* (Psalm 137:4).

I’m talking to some who are, perhaps, listening to me by radio, others who will listen later by recorded tape, and some, God help us, who are in this congregation tonight, but you are believers in God—you are a Christian in captivity; you have been carried away by the devil himself. And, you are living in exile, and you have lost your song.

I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian

Now, what happens when a Christian is captured by the world, the flesh, and the devil? What happens to him? I want you to see. First of all, I want you to see the sad misery of a captured Christian. Notice in verse 1: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137:1). You are going to find out something, my friend. When God saves you, He does not fix you where you cannot sin anymore, but He fixes you where you cannot sin and enjoy it anymore. And, I’m going to tell you, if you have been taken captive and you are a true Christian, I can promise you one way that you can know you are saved, if you are living a double life, if you’re living a life of duplicity and worldliness, there will be misery in your heart. And, if you are living a double life and there is not misery in your heart, there is only one reason: you have

never been saved. It is impossible for you to be a captured Christian, it is impossible for you to be a backslidden Christian, it is impossible for you to be living in Babylon and in confusion, and still have joy in your heart.

Now, I'll tell you why. God loves you too much to let you live in Babylon and still have joy in your heart. Now, put your Bible marker there in Psalm 137 and turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 25, and here is the story of how these people were carried away. And, I want you to see what happened; I want you to see why God allowed them to be carried away. Let's read chapter 25, verse 1, and then skip to verse 4: *"The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon"* (Jeremiah 25:1). Now, skip to verse 4: *"The LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear"* (Jeremiah 25:4). God said to His people, "I sent you My preachers; I sent you My prophets. Day after day, week after week, year after year, they preached to you, but you would not hear."

Verse 5: *"They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever:"*—there He speaks of the Lord, the land, and the law—*"and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt."* Now, notice this—verse 8: *"Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all of the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant,"*—underscore that phrase, "my servant"—*"and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover"*—now, watch this very carefully—*"I will take from them the voice of mirth,"*—do you know what *mirth* means? It means, "happiness"—*"I will take the voice of [happiness], and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years"* (Jeremiah 25:5–11).

Now, what happened is this: they rebelled against God; and because they rebelled against God, God carried them away into captivity. And, verse 9 says that God did it through Nebuchadnezzar, who was His servant. Now, this was a pagan king; old Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king. And yet, he's called here, in verse 9, the *servant of the Lord*. Why? God will see to it, my friend—God will see to it—if you're a child of God

and you're living in sin, God will see to it that your joy is taken from you. God loves you too much to let you live in sin and have joy at the same time.

I clipped this a long time ago; I want to read it to you: "Once upon a time, there was a family of wayward members of a church. At one time, they were active members, but they had lost all interest and fallen away. The deacons had talked to the father and his sons, Jim, John, and Sam, about their condition. The preacher had visited them, and many of the brethren had tried to get them back to the church; but all failed. One day, when the boys were out in the pasture, a large rattlesnake bit John, and he became very ill. A physician was called, and after an examination, he pronounced John to be in critical condition. The doctor said, 'About all you can do now is pray.' and he went his way. The father called the preacher, and told him of John's condition, and asked him to pray for John. This was the preacher's prayer: 'O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thy wisdom Thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He's not been inside the church house for years, and it is doubtful that, in all of this time, he felt the need of prayer. Now, we trust this will be a valuable lesson to him and that it will lead him to genuine repentance. And now, O Father, wilt Thou send another snake to bite Sam, and another to bite Jim, and a big one to bite the old man? We've been doing everything we know for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seemed that all of our combined efforts could not do what this one snake has done. Thus, we conclude that the only thing left that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.'"

Now, folks, that sounds humorous, but there's a great thread of truth here. God loves you too much to let you live in sin and still have pleasure, joy, and prosperity.

Now, God says that He did this to these people, His ancient people, because He loved them. Notice in Jeremiah chapter 24 this time, and look with me in verse 5. He's talking about these same people; He's talking about this same captivity: "*Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans*"—that is, "into Babylon." Now, notice this next phrase, and underscore it in your Bible—"*for their good*" (Jeremiah 24:5). God carried these people on to Babylon, not because He didn't love them, but because He did love them.

Oh, dear friend, the Bible says, back in Psalm 137, "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept*" (Psalm 137:1)—the sad misery of a captured Christian. And, I'm going to tell you again that if you are living in this world, and you're living in sin, and it does not hurt your heart, you, my friend, have never been saved. God cannot let you live that way. He loves you too much to live that way.

II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian

I want you to notice something else. Not only the sad misery, but I want you to notice the stinging memory. Notice again in verse 1: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept”*—now, watch—*“when we remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137:1). This is the reason that a Christian can't be happy if he's been captured, if he's a believer in Babylon: because he remembers Zion.

Now, what was Zion? Zion is the holy hill of Jerusalem. Zion was where God had His temple. Zion was where God manifested Himself. It is where God was real. It was the place of the sacrifice for sin. We sing it, Brother Jim, in our hymnal: *“The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets”* (Isaac Watts). It was the nearest and the dearest place to a child of God. And, here these believers, when they were in Babylon with all of the paganism, and all of the licentiousness, and all of the worldliness, they remembered the time when God was so near, and God was so real, and God was so precious. They remembered Babylon. I want to submit they remembered Zion. I want to submit to you that the Christian has even a sweeter place to remember, and the Christian has even a deeper memory. If you have ever experienced the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never ever be happy in Babylon.

I'll tell you why. You remember what you used to be. Babylon has its thrills, and Babylon has its beauty; but it doesn't have Jesus. And, the heart that has known the Lord Jesus, that one that remembers God's Zion, can never ever again be happy. I'll tell you, there are some people living in the world, and there are some of you who are living in the world, but you don't weep. I'll tell you why you don't weep. You don't have any memory. You've never been saved. You don't know what we're talking about. You don't know what it is to have been saved and then go away from the Lord. You don't have anything to remember. First John speaks of you, in the second chapter and the nineteenth verse: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us”* (1 John 2:19). There are some people who leave; there are some people who go away in the battle: they don't weep, because they have never been saved.

Do you have a time and a place where God was real to you? One of our dear members heard me talk about standing on the corner of Calvin Avenue and 39th Street in West Palm Beach, Florida. There was my holy hill; there was my Zion. There I met the Lord, when I looked up to Jesus and asked Him to come into my heart. Do you know what that member did? They had a friend who was going to West Palm Beach and said, *“Would you find the corner of 39th Street and Calvin Avenue and make a picture of it?”* And, they made a picture of that. It's got the post there. On one side it says, *“Calvin Avenue”*; on the other side it says, *“39th Street.”* They had it framed, and I have it in my office. I look at that place. That's my Zion. That's where I met the Lord Jesus in all of His

fullness, in all of His beauty. And, I treasure that someone cared enough to say, “Pastor, here is your Bethel; here is your Zion; here is the place where you met the Lord.” I do have a time. I do have a place. I have some sweet memories. I wonder, do you? If you do, if Jesus Christ is real to you, you’ll never be happy in Babylon.

Somebody wrote these words. We’ve put them in a song:

*Where is the blessedness I knew,
When I first saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.*

—WILLIAM COWPER

Oh, here was a memory—here was a stinging memory. Listen to what they said: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,*”—a sad misery—“*when we remembered Zion*” (Psalm 137:1)—a stinging memory.

III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian

But, I want to tell you something else about this tragedy of a captured Christian. I want you to notice the sarcastic mockery that came their way. Notice in verses 2 and 3: “*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us, required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion*” (Psalm 137:2–3). Now, they were saying this sarcastically. They were saying this to mock the children of God. I’ll tell you, the people of this world delight to see a Christian fall. It thrills them to make a mockery of the people of God, when the people of God fall into sin. Jesus said, in John 15:19, “*If ye were of this world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*”

One of saddest characters of the Old Testament was Samson, the heavyweight champion of the Old Testament who lost his crown and lost his title. And, you remember what the Philistines did when they finally captured Samson? They put out his eyes, and they made him to grind at the mill. They bound him and made him to grind. One preacher preached a sermon on the blinding, binding, grinding power of sin. Can you imagine how the Philistines mocked and laughed at Samson? Well, perhaps you can, if you know how people like Johnny Carson have mocked and laughed at Jim Bakker, and Jimmy Swaggart, and others.

Listen. The comedians of this world, the ungodly of this world, are having a field day.

There are so glad to see any Christian fall—any Christian stumble. It delights them and the people of Babylon. “Sing us a song. Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” The world loves to blur the distinction of between Jerusalem and Babylon. What a mockery! Angels weep and devils laugh when you disgrace the name of Jesus. I want to tell you something, folks. God is listening. I had rather die than disgrace Jesus, and I hope you would too. Oh, how this world—how this world—loves to take a believer and bring him into bondage!

Well, you say, “Who did it: the devil or God?” Both—both. Who exposed all this mess on television? You say, “The devil did it.” No, God did it. God’s purging His Church.

IV. The Stolen Melody of a Captured Christian

Think about it: the sad misery. Think of it: the stinging memory. Think of it: the sarcastic mockery of believers in bondage. Think one other thing with me. Think also of the stolen melody of a believer in captivity. Notice here in verse 4 they ask, “*How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?*” (Psalm 137:4). Did you know that every Christian has been given a song? Every one of us—not just a Robbie Hiner—every Christian has been given a song. But, your song, my dear friend, is linked to your deliverance and your freedom. The songs that the Christians sing are only longings for the free. With that freedom comes a song. When you get in bondage, your song goes.

Notice what the Bible has to say about the Christian song. Let me give you another Psalm—Psalm 32 and verse 7: “*Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance*” (Psalm 32:7). Get it in your mouth. Get it in your heart. Ephesians 5, verse 19: “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:19). What happens when you get to be a Christian in captivity? You can’t sing the Lord’s song in a strange land. There’s only one thing that can steal your song.

A. Suffering Can’t Steal Your Song

Suffering can’t steal your song. If you will remember when the Lord Jesus Christ was in that upper room just before Gethsemane—they had the last supper; bloody Calvary was just a few hours away—do you know what the Bible says? “*And when they had sung an hymn, they went out*” (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). Jesus, facing Calvary, had a song. Paul and Silas, in a dungeon at midnight, sang a song that brought the house down. In a dungeon they sang. Suffering can’t take your song away.

B. Sorrow Can’t Steal Your Song

And, I want to tell you that sorrow can’t steal your song. Isaiah 30, verse 29: “*Ye shall*

have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel” (Isaiah 30:29)—songs in the night. There was a teenage girl. She had a broken heart; she sat down, and she wrote these words:

*Joy through my teardrops, and gains through my losses
Beauty for ashes, and crowns for my crosses;
He binds my wounds, and He dries all my tears
Calms every storm and He conquers my fears.
He gives me hinds’ feet to walk on high places,
He floods my soul with His heavenly graces;
When I am weak then His strength makes me strong
I know I can trust Him, He’s never been wrong.
Trials may come and temptations assail me
Though I may falter, He never will fail me;
So Satan I bind you in His holy name
For at the cross Jesus’ blood overcame!
When doubt comes, when I’m lonely
When my heart is sad;
I’ll lift up mine eyes to my Savior above
And Jesus will make me glad.
When in my heart there is sadness and sorrow
Jesus has promised a brighter tomorrow;
Victory is mine, yes, it’s already won
I’ve only to claim it by faith in God’s Son.
All of my cares I will cast down before Him
Even in trials my heart will adore Him;
He bears my burdens, He comforts my soul
Oh why should I worry when He’s in control?
Lord in the time of deep grief and emotion
I will yet serve You with constant devotion;
You have not failed me one step of the way
That is the reason I’ll trust You and say:
I will praise You! I will praise You!
Jesus Christ my King;
For You fill my heart with a song in the night
Yes, You make my heart to sing!*

—JANICE ROGERS

The girl who wrote that was my own daughter. Her name is Janice. She wrote it in a time of deep emotion and grief. But, I'll tell you one thing about Janice. Ever since she was a little girl, she's had a song in her heart, because she's walked close to the Lord Jesus. I want to tell you, friend, suffering can't take your song, and sorrow can't take your song.

C. Sin Can Take Your Song

There's only one thing that can steal your song, and it's sin—for you to be carried away captive. A Christian in captivity has no song. David was carried away captive by sin, and David said, in Psalm 51, *“Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and mouth shall shew forth thy praise”* (Psalm 51:14–15). Christians in captivity have no song to sing.

Do you know one way that I know when I'm filled with the Spirit, one way I know when I'm walking close with God? I get tired. I carry a burden. I carry a load. But, I want to give you a testimony. Day after day after day, there is unspeakable joy in my heart. I'm not saying that because it sounds good; I'm not saying that because I want to brag on me—God forbid. I'm saying that as a testimony, my friend. I can tell when I'm close to the Lord. I get in my automobile and just say, “Jesus, I love You. You're so wonderful. I praise You.” Robbie, sometimes I roll up the window and sing, just praising the Lord, because there's a song in my heart.

Conclusion

Now, friend, the devil wants to carry you away captive. He wants to take you from Zion to Babylon. And, there he wants to put misery in your heart. There he wants to bring mockery to your life. There he wants to take the melody out of your heart, and bring you into bondage, and make you a disgrace to Almighty God. I wonder if there's not somebody here tonight who's lost your song. You know what God did for these people? God restored them, and God brought them back to the holy city. God wants to bring you home tonight. I wandered far away from God. Now, I'm coming home.

Christians in Captivity

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: December 8, 1985

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 137:1–4

“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?”

PSALMS 137:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. A Languishing Misery
- II. A Lingering Memory
- III. A Laughing Mockery
- IV. A Lacking Melody

Conclusion

Introduction

“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:4). Let me give you the background of this Psalm. God had been so good to His people, Israel. God gave to them a land. God gave to them a law. And, to crown it off, God gave to them a Lord, Himself. Do you know what they did? They defiled the land. They defied the law. They denied the Lord. And, because of that, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, a cruel pagan king with his army, to carry them away out of the land of Judah, out of Jerusalem, and out of Zion to a place of bondage. They were carried to a strange land—a foreign country—to Babylon. And, there they became captives in Babylon, and this Psalm was written. Perhaps it was written by Jeremiah. Some think Jeremiah wrote this Psalm. It’s a plaintive song of saints in captivity.

Now, what does that have to do with me? What does that mean to me today? Remember we told you that there are three questions that you ought to ask when you look at any passage of Scripture. What did it mean then? What does it mean today? That doesn’t mean that their meanings change, but how can I apply what happened to the people back then, how can I apply that today? But, you are not quite ready yet for it to really be meaningful to you. What did it mean then? What does it mean today? Now, I will ask the third question: What does it mean to me personally?

All right, I want to talk to you today about this subject, “Christians in Captivity,” because there is a tremendous lesson for us today. And, I believe that I am talking to many this morning by means of this pulpit, radio, television, and by means of tape later

on, that are living in a Babylonian captivity. You have been taken captive by the world and by the flesh and by the devil.

Now, when you were saved, you were born again. And, when you were born again, you were born free. “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). And, every Christian is freeborn. Friend, I want to tell you that we are to be living lives of freedom over self, sin, and Satan—over circumstances. We are to be living lives free from fear, free from bondage, and free from the strangle hold of sin. The Bible says, “*For sin shall not have dominion over you*” (Romans 6:14). You say, “Well, no Christian is supposed to be completely free.” Then why does the Bible say, “*Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 2:14)? He gives us the victory. “*We are more than conquerors through him that loved us*” (Romans 8:37). But, how sad when Christians who are meant to be free, when Christians who are born free, have been taken captive and taken away into Babylon, as it were, by the world, the flesh and the devil!

What does Babylon stand for? The very word, the very name *Babylon*, means, “confusion.” That’s the meaning of the word: “confusion.” And, Babylon stands for the world with all of its vileness, all of its vices, and all of its vexation. *Zion*, on the other hand, the city of the great King, stands for the Kingdom of God. The very name *Jerusalem* means, the “city of peace.” And, God’s people are to have peace like a river. Jerusalem was the place of sacrifice, the place of praise, and the place where God manifests himself. It is the city of the great King. We sing it: “The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets.” In the Bible you’ll always have contrasted Jerusalem and Babylon. We who are saved and we who are living in liberty and freedom are dwelling spiritually in Jerusalem. Those who have been saved and are carried away into captivity in Babylon are worldly Christians who have been taken captive.

Now, with that as a background, I want you to see and apply Psalm 137 to your heart today. And, there are four basic things I want you to see.

I. A Languishing Misery

And, the very first thing I want you to see about these saints in exile and these saints in captivity is what I’m going to call their languishing misery. Look, if you will, in verse 1: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept*” (Psalm 137:1). They’re sitting down languishing there. And, they are weeping there in misery by the rivers of Babylon. “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept*” (Psalm 137:1). Why? They were God’s people. They were not meant to be in bondage. Listen to your pastor this morning, my dear friend. A freeborn Christian who finds himself in bondage will always find himself in misery.

Now, God does not fix you up when He saves where you cannot sin anymore, but,

my dear brother or sister, He fixes you where you cannot sin and enjoy it anymore. And, when you as a child of God are taken captive by the devil, taken captive by the flesh, taken captive by your carnal will, when that happens, then your joy goes. You don't lose your salvation. David didn't say, "Lord, restore unto me thy salvation." But, he said, "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation*" (Psalm 51:12). Now, who caused them to be carried captive into Babylon? Well, I'm going to show you in a moment that God did it. And, God did it not because He did not love them. But, I'm going to show you in a moment, God did it because He did love them.

I read an amusing story years ago about a family of people who at one time were faithful Christians. They lived in the church, and they loved the Lord, but they backslid. The world, the flesh, and the devil had taken them captive. There was a man and three sons. And, the names of these sons were Jim, John, and Sam. And, these people had been visited by the pastor, and he tried to get them back into the fold, back into the heavenly Jerusalem. The world just seemed to have a grip on them. And, various church members went by to visit them to try to get them back. It didn't seem to do much good.

Then one day when John was out in the pasture, a rattlesnake bit him. They called the doctor. He was gravely ill. The doctor did what he could do, and then the doctor told John's father, he said, "I've done all I can do. It's in the hands of God. All I can say is you'd better get those who know how to pray to pray." John's father called the pastor. He said, "Pastor, we are in dire need. We need someone to pray for us. Gather the saints and pray for John." The pastor came to pray. And, I have his prayer recorded according to this little story, and want you to hear what he prayed. I quote: "All wise and righteous Father, we thank thee that in thy wisdom thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He's not been inside the church house for years, and it is doubtful that in all that time he has felt the need of prayer. Now, we trust this will be a valuable lesson to him and that it will lead him to genuine repentance. And now, Father, wilt thou send another snake to bite Sam, another to bite Jim, and a big one to bite the old man? We've been doing everything we knew for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seems that all of our combined efforts could not do what this snake has done. Thus we conclude that the only thing left that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. We pray in Jesus name. Amen."

Now, before you think that's a little farfetched, I want you to turn to Jeremiah chapter 25 for just a moment, and I want you to see how they got down into Babylon. Jeremiah chapter 25, and I begin reading in verse 4: "*And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early*"—that means they had an eight o'clock worship service—"*and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.*"

They said,”—that is, the prophets said—*“Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever;”*—that is, “stay here in Zion, I’ll keep you here in Zion. Just dwell here, obey Me”—*“and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.”* Just underscore that: “to your own hurt.” *“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD,”*—that is, God is going to do it—*“and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon...”*—now, I want you to underscore something very amazing—*“and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant,”*—now, this is a pagan king. Nebuchadnezzar my servant—*“and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth,”*—that is, laughing—*“and the voice of gladness,”*—that means joy—*“the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jeremiah 25:4–11).

Now, notice what God is saying. God was saying that Nebuchadnezzar was His rattlesnake. That is, God sent a pagan king. And, that pagan king—that trouble and that calamity—was sent by Almighty God to His own people to bring them into bondage, to bring them into captivity, because they had so disobeyed the Lord.

The very first thing I want to get into your heart, oh, my dear friend, today is that when you allow yourself to go after other gods, when you allow yourself to turn from the Lord your God, you are going to find yourself in a place of captivity. And, that place of captivity is going to be a place of misery. The most miserable man on Earth is not a lost man, but a saved man in captivity—a saved man in captivity; a saved man, a saved woman out of the will of God. *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept”* (Psalm 137:1).

II. A Lingering Memory

But, not only a languishing misery, but a lingering memory. Psalm 137:1 says, *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”*—*“when we remembered Zion.”* Now, what is Zion? That’s Jerusalem. That is the place of the holy temple. That is the place of glad song. That was the place of the sacrifice of sin. That was the place where God manifested Himself to them. That was the place where God was real. That was the place of freedom, liberty, deliverance. And, they remembered that.

Now, there are some who go out from us, and they live in Babylon, but they don't weep. And, I'll tell you why they don't weep. They have no memory. And, the reason they have no memory is because there is nothing to remember. They never met the Lord. They never knew the Lord. They never were saved. The Bible says, in 1 John 2, *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"* (1 John 2:19). We have people who go back to the world, the sin, the flesh, and the devil. They don't remember. They've never been saved. I want to tell you something, friend. A child of God will never be happy in Babylon, because he has a memory—he has a memory.

Do you have a time, a place, where Jesus Christ was real to you? Oh, a time when you knew Him in all of that fullness, all of that joy, and all of that thrill? Oh, when Jesus Christ was so real to you, as it were, you could reach out and touch Him, or where the Holy Spirit of God melted your heart when you thought about Him? You couldn't pray, but what there were tears? Someone would sing "ten thousand joys"—you wanted to stand up and shout and say, "glory to God"? And, now your heart is cold and indifferent, but you remember; you know what it used to be like? Oh, my friend, I pray God is in your heart if you're in Babylon today, that there will be that lingering memory.

*Where is the blessedness I knew,
When I first saw the Lord?
Where is that soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?
What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.
—WILLIAM COWPER*

III. A Laughing Mockery

I want to say a third thing. Not only do these people speak here of a languishing misery, not only do they speak of a lingering memory, but oh, my friend, they speak of a laughing mockery. Look, if you will, in verses 2 and 3: *"We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion"* (Psalm 137:2–3). Do you know what they did? They mocked them. Their captors, the Babylonians, ridiculed them. They said, "Hey, you're supposed to be a happy people. You're supposed to be a spiritual people. Sing us a song. Show us how happy you are. Sing us one of the songs of Zion." And, how they sneered and how they

laughed at these pitiful people who were children of God taken bondage!

I want to tell you the hordes of Hell mock any Christian who is not living for Jesus. How the devil delights for a deacon, a teacher, a Christian choir member, or anybody else for that matter, who once knew the Lord to be taken captive! How they put us on display! How they ridicule! You see, it is Christ in our hearts, Christ in our lives, that makes the difference and brings them under conviction. How the world loves to homogenize Babylon and Zion, to bring us together! They want us to sing God's song in a strange land. They enjoy taking the songs of Zion and putting them in the nightclubs. I've always thought it quite strange that our city fathers will have some celebration down on the riverfront. Generally, it is sponsored by some brewery. They'll say, "We are going to have music on the riverfront. We're going to have jazz, and we're going to have rock, and we're going to have a gospel group." Not this gospel group, they're not. Not, dear friend, when they are down there being sponsored by some beer company, and all of that is mixed up together. And, they want us to sing the songs of Zion and mix a little gospel in with a little boogie, and mix a little gospel in with a little rock, and mix a little gospel in with a little jazz, and sing the songs of Zion in a strange land. God help us.

The world loves that, because they know what we have is not real, and that makes them all the more comfortable. You'll have more of that happening this Christmas season than any other time of year. You'll have a giddy crowd that will get around a little manger scene. They'll sing, "Away in a manger," "Sweet little Jesus boy." I want to tell you that sweet little Jesus boy was the sovereign God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings. And, that same giddy crowd that will be singing around that manger one week later with bleary eyes and liquored breath will be singing "Auld Lang Syne" at some hellion's New Year's party. The same crowd will want the songs of Zion and the songs of Babylon sung together. "Sing us a song of Zion," they say, as they laugh, as they mock, and as they ridicule. God forbid that it should happen.

IV. A Lacking Melody

What happens when Christians go into captivity? Languishing misery. What happens? Lingering memory—thank God for it. What happens? Laughing mockery. But, the last thing I want you to see, lacking melody, a lost song. Look, if you will, in verse 4: "*How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?*" (Psalm 137:4). Dear friend, let me tell you how we got our song. Do you know how the Lord's song comes? The Lord's song is a song of deliverance. Every Christian has a song, and it is a song of deliverance. Let me give you a wonderful verse to put in your margin. It is Psalm 32:7: "*Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance*" (Psalm 32:7)—"*songs of deliverance.*" You see, dear friend, a song comes when we are delivered and when we are set free. It is the song of

the soul set free. That's the song of deliverance.

Do you know the first recorded song in all of the Bible sung to God, directed to God? Do you know where it is found? It is found in Exodus chapter 15, and it is the song of Moses and the Lamb. It is the song when they came out of the land of bondage, as they came out under the blood of the lamb and through the Red Sea. And, there when they came through the Red Sea, the Bible says they sang the song of Moses and the Lamb, a song of deliverance (Exodus 15:1; Revelation 15:3). What a song it must have been—600,000 men in the male chorus, 600,000 women singing the refrain, as they gave Jehovah God praise because He had set them free!

And, you see, dear friend, all of the songs of the Christians are songs of the freeborn, those who have been delivered. They are songs of deliverance. David said, in Psalm 40, *“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth”* (Psalm 40:2–3). You see, it is the deliverance from the pit that gives us the song.

Now, friend, I want to tell you, when you lose that deliverance, it is at that time that you lose your song. There is only one thing that can take your song. Sorrow can't take your song. Suffering cannot take your song. Jesus Christ, the night before He was crucified, went to the upper room there with His disciples. There He had that memorial meal. Just a few hours away was dark Gethsemane and bloody Calvary, and He knew it. The ruby red fruit of the vine spoke of His blood. The broken bread spoke of His body that would be abused and broken. But, the Bible says after that memorial supper, listen to it: *“They had sung an hymn, they went out”* (Matthew 26:30). Jesus singing. Why? Because sorrow cannot take your song.

Paul and Silas, preaching the gospel at Philippi, were thrown into a dungeon. The Bible says, *“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God”* (Acts 16:25). God sent an earthquake. That concert brought the house down. God sent an earthquake. And, at midnight they sang. Do you know why? The prophet Isaiah says that God gives songs in the night (Isaiah 30:29). Joyce and I after we just graduated from seminary and took our first little church, precious little church, we had been there just a few weeks, and I was preaching on the Lord's Day that was Mother's Day. On that day, our precious little baby boy named Philip died unexpectedly, suddenly. He was the most handsome, precious beautiful child that you've ever seen, seeming, to us, the epitome of health. Like *that*, he died in his crib on Mother's Day after I'd just preached on the glories of a Christian home. We lived about 70 miles from West Palm Beach. I was pastoring a church in Fort Pierce. We got in our car to drive to be with our parents. Do you know what we did the entire distance? We sang the entire way. We sang. And, God gave us a song right in the middle of all of that: songs in the night.

I want to tell you, my dear friend, suffering cannot take your song, sorrow cannot

take your song, adversity cannot take your song, and pain cannot take your song. There is only one thing that can take your song, and that is sin. That's all. I mean, how can you sing the Lord's song in a strange land when you because of your sin have been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil? *"How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?"* (Psalm 137:4). He gives us songs of deliverance.

Now, friends, if you are not being delivered, you don't have any reason to sing. It is when he sets us free that we have a song to sing. And, I know a lot of folks who have evidently have lost their song. Now, I watch you when we sing on Sunday morning, folks. And, I want to tell you, some of you sit there, and rather than singing, as Dr. Lee said, "you've got a face so long it looks like you eat oatmeal out of a lead pipe."

*Let those refuse to sing,
Who never knew our God;
But [children] of the heavenly King,
But [children] of the heavenly King
[Shall sing] their joys abroad,
[Shall sing] their joys abroad.*

—ISAAC WATTS

Oh, we're to sing. You say, "Well, Brother Rogers, I'm not musical." Well, I'm not all that musical either. But, the Bible says, in Ephesians 5:19, that when we're filled with the Spirit, we are to be *"singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19). Isn't that right? You can make it in your heart if you can't make it in your mouth. As a matter of fact, they said they hung their harps on the willows (Psalm 137:2). Did you know that every Christian has a harp? It is the harp of the heart. This word "making melody in your heart" (Ephesians 5:19), actually, in the Greek language means, "to strum a harp." My heart is my harp, and with it I praise the Lord God, and with it I sing to God. You think I can't carry a tune, but you're wrong. I just can't unload it. But, brother, I carry it. There is a song in my heart because of Jesus.

By the way, you make fun of me. You want to know who is going to be the best singer when we get to Heaven? *"So the last shall be first"* (Matthew 20:16). Amen? Let me tell you something, folks. Jesus gives us a song: songs in the night. Oh, the sadness when the devil steals our song. *"How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?"* (Psalm 137:4).

Conclusion

The tragedy of "Christians in Captivity": languishing misery, lingering memory, laughing mockery, and lacking melody, because they are in captivity.

Don't Lose Your Song

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: September 24, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 137:1–4

*“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”*

PSALMS 137:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian
 - A. Laughter Is Not Joy
 - B. Happiness Is Not Joy
 - C. Being Successful Is Not Joy
 - D. Joy Is God's Plan for You
- II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian
- III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian
- IV. The Stolen Melody of a Captured Christian

Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God's Word and find Psalm 137, and in a moment we're going to begin reading in the first verse—Psalm 137: “Don't Lose Your Song.”

Max Lucado tells the story of a woman who had a parakeet whose name was Chippy. And, Chippy's cage needed to be cleaned out, and so she had the idea that she would clean it with the vacuum cleaner hose while Chippy was still in the cage. And so, she took the attachment off the end, and with the tube, she stuck the tube down there in the bottom of Chippy's cage, and the phone rang. She turned around to answer the phone, and there was a sound, and she looked up, and Chippy was gone. She was frantic. She cut open the vacuum cleaner bag, and there was Chippy inside. He was still alive, but he was covered with dust and soot and grime. She didn't know what else to do, so she ran into the bathroom, put Chippy under the faucet, and washed him off. And, there he was all wet and shivering. What else could she do but get the hair dryer down, and dry poor Chippy? And so, she blasted him with hot air from the hair dryer. And, there he was all fluffed up again, and she put him back in the cage.

There was a person who heard about this and came to write up the story. Later on,

the person who wrote the story up came back and asked this woman, “How is Chippy?” And, she said, “Well, he seems to be normal except for one thing: Chippy doesn’t sing anymore. He just sits and stares.” Well, I can imagine why. How would you feel if you’d been sucked in, washed up, and blown dry? I mean, how would you feel? Well, Chippy lost his song. The sad thing is, there are a lot of Christians who have lost their song.

Listen to this scripture here from Psalm 137: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?”* (Psalm 137:1–4). Here were some people carried away captive to Babylon, and as a result they have lost their song.

Now, let me give you the background for this passage of Scripture and this wonderful Psalm. God had blessed His chosen people, and God had given to them a land. God had given to them a law, and God had given to them Himself, a Lord. And, they defiled the land; they defied the law; they denied the Lord. And, as a result, they’re carried away captive to Babylon.

Now, in the Bible, Babylon was a very real place, but it’s also a symbolic place. Babylon in the Bible was known for the very thing that its name implies: confusion. It speaks of the world with its vanity, the world with its vileness, and the world with its vexation. Babylon is set over against Jerusalem: Babylon, the hellish city; Jerusalem, the holy city. Jerusalem was known for its saints. Jerusalem was known for its salvation. Jerusalem was known for its song. So, Babylon was known for confusion. Jerusalem was known for holiness.

Now, these people had been carried from Jerusalem, from the holy city to the heathen city. They are God’s people, but they are God’s people in captivity. And, as a result of being in captivity, they have lost their song. Now, what does that have to do with you? Well, did you know that as a Christian you can be taken captive? You can be taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. And, spiritually, you can be living in Babylon. And, when you’re living in Babylon, you’re going to be asking yourself this question: “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

Now, I know many Christians who are saved, but very frankly, they’ve lost their song, because they’re Christians living in exile. You know that when you are born again, you’re a freeborn citizen of Heaven, of the New Jerusalem. And, God, when He saved you, put a song down deep. And, there’s only one thing that can steal your song, and that is sin: when you’re taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, having said that, I want you to notice some things with me today. And, I pray God that He will rivet them into your soul and upon your consciousness.

I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the sad misery of a captured Christian. Look in verse 1: *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept"* (Psalm 137:1). When you are taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, the result is misery in your heart. Now, learn this, and learn it well: *The most miserable man on Earth is not a lost man. The most miserable man or woman on Earth is a saved man out of fellowship with God.* Amen? More miserable than any unsaved person could be. Here were God's people. They were meant for Jerusalem. They were not meant for Babylon. They were meant for the holy city, not the hellish city. And, there in Babylon, they sit down, and they wept.

One of the ways that you can know that you're saved is not that you always have joy. As a matter of fact, one of the ways that you can know that you're saved is this: if you're living in sin, and you don't have joy, then you may believe that you're saved. Again, sadness and turmoil and discord may be a sign that you truly, really know the Lord. God has engineered it that you cannot be joyful and be out of fellowship with Him. Sin and joy do not dwell in the same heart.

What is joy anyway? What is joy that bursts forth in song?

A. Laughter Is Not Joy

Well, it's not laughter. I'm not opposed to laughter, but laughter is not joy. Here's a wonderful verse. I want you to listen to it—Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verses 5 and 6: *"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity"* (Ecclesiastes 7:5–6).

Now, this world is laughing its way to Hell. Listen to your sitcoms. That's the laughter of fools. The devil knows what people laugh at they can never really take it seriously again. So, homosexuality, drunkenness, perversion, lust, drunkenness, blasphemy—that's the laughter of fools. And, the Bible says it's like thorns crackling under a pot, the crackling of a fire, that which is being consumed. Laughter is not joy. There's nothing wrong with laughter, but it's no substitute for joy.

Today there is in some parts of America a thing called *the laughing revival*. People go to church, and they laugh uncontrollably. They're out of control. And, they say, "This must be revival, ha ha, because we're laughing it up." That's not revival. Revival begins with weeping, and it results in holiness and deep joy. And, the Bible speaks of those who will have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5). I want to say that laughter is not joy.

B. Happiness Is Not Joy

I want to say, friend, that happiness is not joy. You're not supposed to be happy all the

time. Happiness is like the surface of the sea. Conditions change, and sometimes the sea is very calm, and you're happy. And, sometimes the storms whip the waves, and you're unhappy. But, down deep in the bottom of the ocean, there's a part of that ocean that's always undisturbed. That's what joy is. Joy is that which is down deep. Now, happiness works best when joy is present. That's a wonderful combination: to be happy and to have joy at the same time. And, happiness is at its fullest when joy is there.

But, let me say that joy can be there when sadness is there also. And, the joy of the Lord, it doesn't take away the sadness. Joy of the Lord doesn't take away the pain. It helps you to bear it. And, happiness and sadness may come, and they may go, but joy remains when you're right with the Lord. This joy is something far deeper, far more wonderful.

C. **Being Successful Is Not Joy**

What are we talking about here when we talk about joy? Laughter is not joy. Happiness is not joy. Being successful is not being joyful. The most successful people are not always the most joyful. The richest people indeed are not the most joyful people. You can have seeming success and get deeper and deeper into despondency—and I'll tell you why: because those who are not successful think if they could be successful then they might be joyful. And so, they have something to reach for. But, those who are successful find out that joy is not there, and they don't even have anything to reach for.

I think I told you about the little boy who loved pancakes so much. He asked Mama one day, "Mama, can I have all the pancakes I want for breakfast?" She just decided she'd give him all he wanted. And so, she got the griddle hot and began to serve him pancakes. And, he ate and he ate and he ate. There were still pancakes on the griddle. She turned to him and said "Son, you want another pancake?" He said, "No, Mommy." He said, "I don't even want all the ones I've already had." Now, that's the way it is with success. When you get all that you want, you realize that there's a diminishing return.

D. **Joy Is God's Plan for You**

What is true joy? Well, listen. Here's what joy has been described as. Joy has been called the ecstasy of eternity in a soul that has made peace with God and is ready to do His will. You don't find this joy. This joy finds you.

Now, having said that, joy is God's plan for you. Then therefore, if you don't have joy, it is because you have been taken captive. Look again at verse 1: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept*" (Psalm 137:1). Did you know that God, who loves you, will engineer your misery? The God who wants to give you joy is the God who loves you so much that He will take away your joy if you live in sin, if you become a backslidden Christian.

Now, that's Psalm 137. I want you to turn to what the Psalmist was talking about.

Would you turn to the Book of Jeremiah, please—Jeremiah chapter 25. This is worth turning to—Jeremiah chapter 25. Look in verse 4. God is speaking to the children of Israel, but He’s also correspondingly speaking to you today: *“And the LORD...”*—this is Jeremiah 25, verse 4—*“And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.”* God sent His prophets, His preachers, but God’s people wouldn’t hear. *“They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.”* Underscore that: *“to your own hurt.”* *“Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth,”*—do you know what that means? The voice of joy—*“and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jeremiah 25:4–11).

Now, God said, “I sent My prophets to you. I sent My Word to you, but you wouldn’t listen. You wouldn’t heed My Word. And, therefore,” God says, “I’m going to use a pagan king as My servant.” Notice in verse 9 He calls this pagan king of Babylon, He calls that king His servant. And, God says, “I am going to carry you to Babylon for your good.”

Let me tell you this. If you’re living in misery today, if there’s no song down in your heart, there may be happiness in your life, there may be success in your life, there may be laughter in your life, but if there is no joy in your life, it is because you have been taken captive, and God has sent you into captivity. Why? For your own good. God loves you too much to let you be backslidden and still have joy in your heart and in your life.

I read this story years ago. I clipped it out. It illustrates what I’m talking about. Here it goes. “Once upon a time, there was a family of wayward members of a church. At one time, they were active members, but they had lost all interest and had fallen away. The deacons had talked to the father and his sons, Jim, John, and Sam, about their condition. The preacher had visited them many times, and many of the brethren tried to get them back to the church, but all failed. But, one day when they boys were out in the

pasture, a large rattlesnake bit John, and he became very ill. A physician was called, and after an examination, he pronounced John to be in critical condition. The doctor said, 'About all you can do now is pray.' And, he went his way. The father called the preacher and told him of John's condition and asked him to pray for John. This was the preacher's prayer: 'O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thy wisdom Thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He's not been inside the church house for years, and it is doubtful that in all that time he has felt the need of prayer. Now, we trust that this will be a valuable lesson to him, and that it will lead him to genuine repentance. And now, O Father, wilt Thou send another snake to bite Sam, and another to bite Jim, and a big one to bite the old man. We've been doing everything we know for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seems that all of our combined efforts could not do what this one snake has done. Thus we conclude that the only thing left that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.'"

God says, "I'm going to send you away captive into Babylon for your good." And, like God might use a rattlesnake, God used this pagan king Nebuchadnezzar to take these people and show them that they cannot live in sin and have joy with the Lord at the same time. And so, what I am talking about, first of all, is the misery, the sad misery of a captured Christian. And, I think some of you are right there. I mean, if you'd be honest with me, you would say, "Adrian Rogers, there is no song in my heart today. I'm a member of this church or some church. I profess my faith in Christ, and honestly I expect to go to Heaven, but very frankly, how tedious and tasteless are the hours. Inside I am spiritually dry. I have lost my song."

II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian

Now, here's the second thing. Not only the sad misery of a Christian in exile, but I want you to notice the stinging memory of a Christian in exile. Go back to our text again, if you will, in Psalm 137, and look in verse 1 again: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,*" —that's the misery—"*when we remembered Zion*" (Psalm 137:1)—that's the memory—the memory. Now, you see, they're sitting down. They've been taken captive. They're in exile. Their joy is gone, and it is compounded by the fact that they remember what used to be. What is Zion? Zion is the holy hill where the temple was. That's where the Shekinah glory of God dwelt. That's where the offering for sin was made. That's where cleansing for sin was. That's where the people met and worshiped and praised God. And, all they had there was a memory.

Every real Christian remembers Zion. He remembers when he met the Lord. He remembers when he experienced Jesus. He remembers that time when Jesus was sweet and real and precious to him. Now, if Jesus has never been real to you, if Jesus

has never been sweet to you, if Jesus has never precious to you, if you've never known the Shekinah glory of God, if you've never had a song, if you've never known sin forgiven and the burden lifted, you won't weep when you get in Babylon, because you'll never know the difference.

You know, there are a lot of folks—there are some of you—who are living high, wide, and handsome. There are some of you who are living in sin, and you couldn't care less. Do you know why? You don't have anything to remember. You've never been there. You've never known the Lord. You've never known the *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8). You've never known the presence of God. The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets, but you've not tasted a one of them. You have nothing to remember.

And, what I'm talking to you today: about the misery that comes to a believer when he's out of fellowship with God. It goes right past you. You don't understand that at all. And, I'll tell you why. You've never ever really known Jesus. First John chapter 2 and verse 19 speaks of those kinds of people: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for had they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us”* (1 John 2:19). You see these folks. They come to church a while. They sit in church a while. They may go up in the baptism and get baptized. They may sing when Brother Whitmire or Brother Parker says sing. They may go through all of that, but then they lapse and they go away. They have no sweet memories. Oh, they can remember the fact that they once were in church. But, God has never been real to them, and they don't have anything to remember.

But, I'm talking to some of you this morning—there was a time when Jesus Christ was real to you. There was a time when the love of God was like a burning fire in your heart and praise was real in your heart. And now, all you've got is a memory. That's what these people had. They said, *“We wept, because we remembered Zion.”* Is there a time and a place where Jesus Christ was real to you, and now you've been taken into exile?

III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian

First of all, there's the sad misery. Then, there's the stinging memory. But, here's the third thing I want you to see—and, this breaks my heart to read it: There is the sarcastic mockery of a captured Christian. Look in verses 2 and 3: *“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.”* What does it mean *“the willows”*? Well, there were weeping willows there by the rivers of Babylon, and these people, these Jews who would play their songs on a harp, they hanged their harps on those willow trees. *“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us*

required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion” (Psalm 137:2–3).

Do you know what they were doing? They were mocking them. They were being sarcastic. They were saying, “Well, you’ve got such a mighty God. Why didn’t your God protect you? I mean, your God must not be as strong as the gods of Babylon. Here we’ve come, and we’ve carried you away captive. You call yourselves the people of God. Sing us one of your songs. Sing us a song of Zion.” Misery, memory, mockery: they were mocking the God of Israel. They were holding these people up to ridicule. “Sing us a song of Zion.”

Do you know what breaks my heart? The hordes of Hell are laughing, and some of them are laughing at you, because you’ve been taken captive. And, rather than being a testimony, you’re a detriment to the cause of Christ.

When old Samson was taken by the Philistines, the Bible says, “They made sport of him” (Judges 16:25, 27). Do you know the world loves to make sport of a captured Christian, a Christian living in exile? About a few years ago, there were several well-known television evangelists who got into immorality, and I’ll not call any names, but you know whom I’m talking about. Do you know what the butt of the jokes for late night comedians was for several years? Do you know what they laughed about? Do you know what they made sport of? Do you know what caused them great glee, great joy? It was a so-called man of God, or woman of God, taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil? And, how the people of Babylon rejoice when you and I are no different than they are.

Do you know what the world loves to do? The world loves to blur the distinction between Jerusalem and Babylon. They like to take our songs and sing them in their context. “Sing us a song of Zion,” down there in Babylon. Did you know you can get in a nightclub, and somebody will begin to sing “Amazing Grace,” and all the folks will join in? Did you know that? Did you know that? Did you know that the world has taken quote “gospel” and made it one more of the art forms? There’s rock; there’s gospel; there’s this and that. And, they just sing our songs. Babylon sings our songs. They don’t sing our songs, because they believe our songs. They sing our songs, and they want us to sing our songs to them for entertainment. Because the world loves to blur the distinction, they want our songs sung in Babylon.

If I were a Christian singer, I would not do what some of these Christian singers do. They call it crossover—crossover. That is, they sing here, and then they sing in Vegas. They sing for God’s people, and then they sing for Babylon. Now, let me tell you something. We always ought to sing to Babylon, but never for Babylon. There’s a big difference—there’s a big difference. You don’t take holy things and cast pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). And, you see it at Christmas time. At Christmas, around December the 25th, the people of Babylon are singing “Away in a Manger.” New Year’s

Day, they're singing "Auld Lang Syne" in a drunken debauchery. They love to take all of that and confuse it and mingle it and mix it together. God's people ought to be different. God's people ought to be distinct. And, how the world loves to mock! How the world in sarcasm loves to take the things of God and mix them all up with the things of Babylon, and then stand back, and look at us and say, "Oh you pitiful thing! You are no different than we are. Sing one of the songs of Zion." What a disgrace when Christians lose their distinctiveness! Misery, memory, mockery: when a Christian is taken captive.

IV. The Stolen Melody of a Captured Christian

Yes, there's the sarcastic mockery, but think with me just very quickly about the stolen melody of a captured Christian. Look in verse 4: "*How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?*" (Psalm 137:4). That is, it's impossible. Now, we have been given a song. Every one of us has been given a song, and our song is the song of deliverance. That's the only song we can sing is the song of freedom. Put this in your margin—Psalm 32, verse 7: "*Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance*" (Psalm 32:7). The song that you and I have is the song of deliverance.

Do you know what the first public song was in the Bible, the first song ever sung recorded in the Bible? You can find it in Exodus chapter 15 after God brought the Jews out of Egypt and set them free. It's called the song of Moses and the Lamb (Exodus 15:1–21; Revelation 15:3). It was a song of redemption. It was a song of deliverance. I would have loved to have been there to hear that song. Can you imagine, Brother Jamie, 600,000 male voices in the chorus, singing praise to God, because God had brought them out through the Passover Lamb?

You see deliverance always brings a song. Put this verse down—Psalm 40, verses 2 and 3: "*He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD*" (Psalm 40:2–3). The song that you and I have is the song of the soul set free. And, you can't sing that song in bondage. Do you know why some of you don't sing in the song service? You don't have a song to sing. Let those refuse to sing who never knew our Lord. Friend, when you're redeemed, you can't help but sing. I look at people sometime in a song service; I've seen better looking faces on bottles of iodine. I say, "Do they know the Lord? Have they been redeemed? Is Jesus Christ real to them?"

I am reminded of a preacher who called on one of these men and said, "Brother Jones, would you please stand and lead us in a word of criticism?"

Where is the joy? Listen, folks. I can carry a tune. I just can't unload it. All of us can carry a tune. Listen to Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 19: "*Speaking to yourselves in*

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

There’s only one thing that can take away your melody. There’s only one thing that can steal the melody in your life. And, it’s sin. Suffering can’t do it. Suffering can’t take the song out. Jesus is in the Upper Room—I’ve just visited that Upper Room a few days ago—just before dark Gethsemane, just before bloody Golgotha, and Jesus is there with His disciples. And, do you know what He’s talking to them about? His joy. John 15, verse 11: *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”* (John 15:11). He’s facing agony on the cross. And then, in Matthew chapter 26 and verse 30, the Bible says, *“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives”* (Matthew 26:30). Jesus is singing His way to Gethsemane.

You say, “Pastor Rogers, there’s cancer in my body. There’s bankruptcy in my finances. There’s dissension in my home.” There can still be a song in your heart, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ. Sorrow can’t take away your song. The Bible tells us, at midnight Paul and Silas sang praises to God when they were in a Philippian jail. Their backs had been cut to ribbons, and yet they’re singing. As a matter of fact, they sang so much that God sent an earthquake angel. God was so pleased. It was a concert that brought the house down (Acts 16:25–26).

Joseph T’son, who has preached from this pulpit, a modern-day apostle in Romania, is a dear friend of mine, a friend of this church. Joseph and I were riding around in Romania, and he said, “Adrian, I want to tell you a story.” He said, “The communists came into my house, and the Securitate had come in to look through my library and to go through all of my papers to see if there was anything there in any of my books, anything that I’d written, in any of my tapes anything that I’d said, that they could use to accuse me to put me in prison.” He said, “They just showed up at our house one day—burst in.” They said, “We have papers, and we have a right to go through all of your affairs.” He said, “My wife and I sat there when they were taking my books one at a time.” He said, “Adrian, you know what a preacher’s books mean to him. They were taking my books from my library, all of my books, all of my sermons, all of my papers. They were confiscating them.” And, he said, “They made me sign each one of them, so that they could use it against me if there were anything in that book. I had to put my name in there and say, ‘This is my property.’ And, I was sitting there. And,” he said, “it was a terrible day. They were coming in, bursting into my home. And,” he said, “I didn’t know what they might find in those books, anything that they could use to accuse me, put me in prison, or maybe put me to death. And,” he said, “they handed me a book, and I looked at the title of that book. And,” he said, “the book was, the title, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: Are You Experiencing It Now?—Joy Unspeakable and*

Full of Glory: Are You Experiencing It Now? He said, “Oh, God, yes. I will rejoice in You, my God.” He said, “Elizabeth, we have guests in our home. Make some coffee for these men.” And, they made coffee. And, he said, “I sat back and just praised the Lord.”

Friend, listen. Suffering, persecution, cannot take away your joy. It can't steal your song. One of the darkest days I've ever known was a Mother's Day, when I as a young preacher had just preached a sermon on the glories of a Christian home, went to our little parsonage, which was next door to the church, when Joyce came and said, “Adrian, there's something wrong with our baby.” We had a new baby. His name is Philip. I went in there, and Philip was not breathing. And Philip died with one of those sudden death syndrome infant deaths. You've heard me tell the story before. I'd never faced death, not in my family. I'd not lost a brother, sister, father, mother, anybody close to me. And now, our newborn baby that we'd had just a few months and loved—what a beautiful child!—was gone. I want to give you this testimony. God touched down in my heart, and in Joyce's heart, that Mother's Day. We were in Fort Pierce, Florida. That's where the church was. Our parents and our families were in West Palm Beach, about 65 miles away. We decided we would go that Sunday afternoon to be with our parents. And, Joyce and I drove for 65 solid miles singing one song after another. We sang all the way to West Palm Beach one song after another. And, in the deepest sorrow, in the deepest night, I can testify that God gave a song.

The joy of the Lord is not there to remove the pain. The joy of the Lord is there to help you bear the pain. Happiness is not joy. Sadness can't take it away. There's only one thing that can take your joy, and that's for you to be backslidden and become a Christian in exile. “There by Babylon we wept. We hung our harps on the tree.”

Conclusion

There was the stolen melody of a captured Christian, but I've got wonderful news for you. The God that sent these Christians away captive for their good was the God who also brought them back from captivity. And, here's the news for you today—wonderful, wonderful news. You can sing it. This song you can sing even in a strange land. And, what is the song that you can sing even in a strange land?

I've wandered far away from God,

Now I'm coming home.

—WILLIAM J. KIRKPATRICK

“I'm coming home.”

Has the devil stolen your song? Has he? David, who got into deep sin, David, who was away from God, said, in Psalm 51, “O Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and then my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness” (Psalm 51:12, 14). Have you lost the joy of your salvation? Then, I want you today to come home. I want you to

renounce all sin. I want you to say, “Lord, anew and afresh, I’m giving you my heart. Lord, I want a personal revival. I want the joy back. I want the song back. I want a song in my soul, Lord. I want it back.” And, perhaps you’ve never known a song. You don’t even have Zion to remember. Maybe you’ve never been saved.

*If you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy,
Let Jesus come into your heart.*

—JOSEPH D. CARLSON

Right now pray and say, “Lord Jesus, come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me.”

The Sad Case of the Stolen Song

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 22, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 137:1–4

“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?”

PSALMS 137:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian
- II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian
- III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian
- IV. The Silenced Melody of a Captured Christian

Conclusion

Introduction

Find your Bible and find the Book of Psalms, the middle book, and then find Psalm 137. Here's a tragic story. God had given to His ancient people Israel a land, a law, and a Lord. They defiled the land. They denied the Lord. They defied the law. And, as a result, the Babylonians came, and the Babylonians carried them away to a strange land, a land of captivity. These people, who were meant to sing, lost their song. They're taken captive. And, here's the Psalm that describes it: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy”* (Psalm 137:1–6).

Max Lucado tells a story about Chippy. I'm going to share it with you. He says, “Chippy the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage, the next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippy's owner decided to clean Chippy's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She had barely said *hello* when Chippy got sucked in. The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the

bag. There was Chippy alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him up and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippy under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippy was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do: she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippy never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, the reporter who had initially written about the event contacted Chippy's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippy doesn't sing much anymore. He just sits and stares." Well, it's not hard to see why. Here's this poor bird sucked in, washed up, and blown over. That's enough to steal any parakeet's song.

But, there's something that has stolen the song of many Christians. There are many Christians, and some who are listening to me today, you have lost your song. You have been taken captive, like Israel so long ago, not by the Babylonians, but by the world, the flesh, and the devil. And, you have lost your song.

Now, there's a lesson in this psalm for us today. Babylon represents the world with its vanity and with its vexation and with its vileness. They were taken from Jerusalem, the holy city, to the hellish city. Jerusalem represents salvation. It represents the saints. It represents songs. But, here God's people had been taken captive, and as a result they lost their song.

Do you have a song today? Now, don't give me the correct answer. You don't even have to answer it out loud. But, answer this question, my brother, my sister: Is there a song in your heart this morning? Do you have "*joy unspeakable and full of glory*" (1 Peter 1:8)? Are you singing, "*making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19)? As we study this Psalm, I want to lay four basic thoughts upon your heart.

I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the sad misery of a captured Christian. The key word here is *misery*. Look in verse 1: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion*" (Psalm 137:1). They've been taken captive, they were in Babylon, and they weep.

Now, look up here and let me tell you something. One of the ways that you can tell that you truly know the Lord, that you've been saved, that you've been redeemed is this: Is there sadness, heartache, when you're not in sweet fellowship with the Almighty? You see—listen—no one who is truly saved can be joyful when he has been taken captive by this world. And, we have a lot of you in this building today who have been taken captive, I believe, and God loves you too much to let you have joy and worldliness at the same time. You cannot have sin and joy in your heart at the same time. Sometimes we think the most miserable man in the world is an unsaved man. Not so. *The most miserable woman in the world is not an unsaved woman. The most*

miserable person in this world—listen—is a saved person out of fellowship with God.

More miserable than the unsaved is a saved person out of fellowship with God.

Now, what is true joy? Not laughter. You can laugh. As a matter of fact, you may be laughing to cover up the fact that you have no joy. Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 6 speaks of that laughter like the *“crackling of thorns under a pot”* (Ecclesiastes 7:6). As a matter of fact, we have a generation that’s laughing itself into Hell. You can laugh your way into Hell, but you can’t laugh your way out once you get there. Laughter is not joy. Giddiness is not joy. Happiness is not joy. Happiness is like the surface of the sea. It depends upon which way the wind is blowing, as to what the condition of the sea is, but joy is down deep, many fathoms deep, where the winds never touch it. That’s the joy of the Lord.

Now, when joy and happiness get together, that’s wonderful. But, when there is no happiness, thank God for the joy that may not remove the pain but helps you to bear it. Success does not bring joy. Do you know what failure is? Failure is succeeding at the wrong thing. Success has a measure of diminishing returns, because the so-called successful man, woman, they have it all, and they still don’t have joy. Joy is that ecstasy of the soul that is at peace with God. Somebody has said, *“Joy is the flag that is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence there”—“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8). Now, God, I say, loves you too much to let you live taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and still have joy. As a matter of fact, God is the One—now, listen very carefully—God is the One who is going to engineer your sorrow. God, I said, will engineer your sorrow.

Now, put in your margin the Book of Jeremiah 25, and let’s begin in verse 8—Jeremiah 25, verse 8—and I’m going to read through verse 11. Jeremiah the prophet was prophesying, the children of Israel being carried away captive, and here’s what he said: *“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon,”*—now, watch this—*“my servant…”*—just underscore that. Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king, and God calls him *“my servant.”* Now, listen to this—*“Nebuchadrezzar, my servant, and will bring them against this land,”*—that is, *“I’m going to bring these pagans against Israel”—“and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover”*—now, He’s talking to His people—*“I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years”* (Jeremiah 25:8–11).

Now, God says, “Look, you wouldn’t hear my prophets. I’m going to raise up this vile, wicked, strong king, and he’s going to carry you away captive, and you’re going to have no mirth, you’re going to have no joy, you’re going to have no songs. I’m going to put you in a strange land.” Why did God do it? Because He didn’t love them? No, because He did love them.

Let me share this with you. Once upon a time, there was a family of wayward members of a church. At one time, they were active members, but they had lost all interest and had fallen away. The deacons had talked to the father and his sons, Jim, John, and Sam, about their condition. The preacher had visited them. And, many of the brethren had tried to get them back to the church. But, all failed. One day, when the boys were out in the pasture, a large rattlesnake bit John, and he became very ill. A physician was called, and after an examination he pronounced John to be in critical condition. The doctor said, ‘About all you can do now is pray,’ and he went his way. The father called the preacher and told him of John’s condition and asked him to pray for John. This was the preacher’s prayer: “O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thy wisdom Thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He’s not been inside the church house for years, and it is doubtful that in all that time he has felt the need of prayer. Now, we trust that this will be a valuable lesson to him and that it will lead him to genuine repentance. And, now, O Father, wilt thou send another snake to bite Sam, and another to bite Jim, and a big one to bite the old man? We’ve been doing everything we know for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seems that all of our combined efforts could not do what this snake has done. Thus, we conclude that the only thing that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Old Nebuchadnezzar was God’s rattlesnake to bring the children of Israel to their senses. God had given them a law. God had given them a land. God had given them a Lord. God had sent the prophets. But, again, I say, they defiled the land, defied the law, denied the Lord, and they wept. May I remind you one more time, the saddest man on Earth is not an unsaved man, but a saved man out of fellowship with God.

II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian

Number two: I want you to notice not only the sad misery, but I want you to see the stinging memory of a captured Christian—the stinging memory. Look again in verse 1: “*By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion*” (Psalm 137:1)—“*when we remembered Zion.*” They remembered Zion. That’s another word for the Holy Land. That’s another word for Jerusalem. That’s the place where the holy temple was. That’s the place where fellowship with God was. That’s the place where the cleansing from sin was. We sing it in our songs. “The hill of Zion yields a

thousand sacred sweets” (Isaac Watts). But, now all they had was a stinging memory.

May I ask you a question, a personal question? Are you out of fellowship with God today and you remember when you were in fellowship with God? You remember when God was so real to you, where worship was a thrill, where Jesus Christ was sweet and precious, and you could sing it, say it, and mean it: “Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before” (Robert C. Loveless), and now all you have left is sort of a memory, and you feel hollow.

“Well,” you say, “pastor, I don’t have any memories like that, and I’m living in the world.” Well, that’s just because you’ve never been saved. First John chapter 2, verse 19, says, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us”* (1 John 2:19). I know there are some people who have joined a church, been baptized, gone back into the world. They don’t have any memory because they have nothing to remember. They’ve never been saved. But, if you have been twice born, if you’ve walked in fellowship with God, if you’ve known the sweet joy, the glory, the presence of Jesus Christ in your heart, and you’ve been taken captive, your misery and your memory are inextricably interwoven.

III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian

Now, here’s a third thing I want you to see. Not only the misery, and the memory, but I want you to see the mockery of it—the sarcastic mockery of a captured Christian. Look, if you will, in verses 2 and 3. They said, *“We hanged our harps on the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion”* (Psalm 137:2–3). The captives were commanded to sing by their captors, by their tormentors. When they said, *“Sing us one of the songs of Zion,”* all this was was sarcasm. All this was was ridicule.

You know, the devil delights to see a child of God fail. The devil delights when there’s scandal in the church. The devil delights when a child of God lowers the banner and no longer has the cross before him and the world behind him, but turns back to the world. It’s a victory for the world. The world hates us because we love the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, in John chapter 15, verse 19, *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”* (John 15:19). And, the world that hates you rejoices when you fall, when you stumble. Have you ever thought about how the Philistines rejoiced when they took Samson captive and made him grind at the mill and turned him into like a beast of burden, how they laughed, how they mocked? I’d rather die by torture than to give the enemy an occasion to blaspheme because I’ve turned my

back on Jesus Christ, been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. “Sing us a song of Zion,” they say; “sing one of your wonderful songs.”

Now, friend, we can sing to Babylon, but we never sing for Babylon. Now, a lot of Christian singers—“Christians,” in quotation marks—who like to sing in the choir and then later on sing in the nightclub, friend, that’s casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). We have no right to sing the songs of Zion for this world, and this world that wants to blur the difference between the church and the world. They love to sing the songs of Zion in the bars. Every so often, they’ll strike up “Amazing Grace.” At Christmastime, they’ll sing “Away in a Manager.” One week later in a drunken brawl, they’ll be singing “Auld Lang Syne.” “Sing us the songs of Zion,” the people of Babylon say. Cast your pearls before swine. Become a mockery to the cause of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God forbid, sir, that you should ever bring such blasphemy to Jesus Christ. The mockery of a captured Christian.

IV. The Silenced Melody of a Captured Christian

But, I want you to notice fourthly, the silenced melody—the silenced melody of a captured Christian. Look in verse 4: *“How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?”* (Psalm 137:4). It’s the Lord’s song. And, what song is it? It’s the song of deliverance. Now, if it’s the song of deliverance, how can you sing the song of deliverance when you’ve been taken captive? Every Christian ought to sing a song of deliverance. Listen to Psalm 32, verse 7: *“Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.”* And, then He says, *“Selah”* (Psalm 32:7). Do you know what that means? “Think about that”—“Think about that.” Songs of deliverance. The first recorded public song in the Bible was the song of deliverance. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, headed toward Canaan, crossed the Red Sea, and they were set free from bondage, they sang the song of Moses and the Lamb (Exodus 15:1–21; Revelation 15:3). It’s a song of deliverance—regeneration and deliverance. What a song that must have been, Brother Whitmire: 600,000 male voices singing, with the women singing the refrain, the song of Moses and the Lamb. If you’ve been delivered, you cannot help but sing.

Let me give you another verse—Psalm 40, verses 2 and 3: *“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay...”*—has He done that for you? Listen—*“He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD”* (Psalm 40:2–3). When God brings you up out of the pit, God puts your feet on the rock. You cannot help but sing. We sing a song around here:

Let those refuse to sing

*Who never knew our God,
But children of the heav'nly King,
But children of the heav'nly King,
May [sing] His joys abroad,
May [sing] His joys abroad.*

—ISAAC WATTS

You see these folks sit in church who look liked they've been weaned on dill pickles: no joy, no happiness, no victory. They don't even sing in the song service. One man said to a deacon he knew well, "Brother Jones, would you please stand and lead us in a word of criticism." Let those refuse to sing who never knew our Lord. I'm telling you, if you have been redeemed, if you have been delivered, there will be a song in your heart. It is the song of the soul set free.

Now, I'm not a singer to do solos except when I'm alone in the car with the windows up. Brother Whitmire reminded me that I'm a prisoner singer: always behind a few bars and can't find the right key. Friend, I can carry a tune; I just can't unload it. But, there is in my heart a song that Jesus has given to me. I thought about it when I prepared this message, and I asked myself, Is it true? Do you really have a song? Friend, I do—I do. "Singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord." Don't let the devil steal this song. Ephesians 5, verse 19: "*Speaking to yourself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19).

What steals your song? Sorrow can't steal your song. Jesus was facing dark Gethsemane. Jesus was facing bloody Calvary. And, the Bible tells about how the Lord Jesus Christ there left that place where they were having Passover, and it says, "*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives*" (Matthew 26:30)—Matthew 26, verse 30. Facing the cross, Jesus is singing. Suffering can't take away your song. Paul and Silas had their backs lacerated. They're in stocks and bonds in the filth of the prison. And, the Bible says, in Acts chapter 16, verse 25, "*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them*" (Acts 16:25). No wonder Isaiah chapter 30, verse 29, says this: "Ye shall have a song in the night" (Isaiah 30:29).

Some of you are going through a dark night. Some of you have an incurable disease. Unless God does a miracle, it will take you. Some of you have wayward children. Some are between jobs, and perhaps it looks bleak, because now you've passed the age where people might be looking for someone with your skills. None of that can steal your song. You see, joy does not depend upon what happens. We rejoice in the Lord.

Many of you know that Joyce and I lost a little baby. Our little Philip died in his crib, just two months old—a precious, beautiful baby. We'd never lost a child, like this little

baby died on Mother's Day. I'd just preached on the glories of a Christian home when our little Philip went to Heaven. Joyce and I had to leave Fort Pierce, Florida, to go to West Palm Beach where the funeral would be and where our family was. It's about 60 miles. I can tell you this: that for sixty miles Joyce and I sang. For sixty miles we sang. We sang those great songs that we'd sung before, but they meant so much to us. "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!" "He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone." "My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine." To sing those songs.

What am I saying, folks? I'm saying there's only one thing that can steal your song, and that's sin; and only one kind of sin, and that is your sin.

King David was a mighty man of God, but he let sin get in his life. And, do you know what he prayed in Psalm 51, verse 14? "*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness*" (Psalm 51:14). Sin had stolen his song and had sealed his lips.

Conclusion

Now, these people had been taken captive. And, many today who love God have been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. But, they came home. And, so can you! Jeremiah 24, verses 6 and 7—God made this promise: "*For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God:*"—now, listen to this—"for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:6–7). That's what God wants you to do today.

If you've been backslidden, wandered far away from God, God wants you to return. God wants you to come home. And, when you do, you'll find the song is back there. And, no matter what else you have, if you don't have the song, you don't have much. Here's the way Isaiah put it in Isaiah chapter 55, verse 7: "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*" (Isaiah 55:7). You want to come home? Come! God says, "Just come. Forsake your way, your ungodly thoughts; return unto the Lord." And then, when you do, Isaiah 55, verse 12: "*Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hand*" (Isaiah 55:12). When you come back to God, all nature around you will sing, and you will sing also. Friend, that's revival: when you have a song in your heart.

Now, listen. If you don't know Jesus, you're not going to have a song at all. Oh, you may have one of the giddy songs of Babylon, but not the song of the Lord, because

that's the song of deliverance. If I had a thousand lives, I would give them all to Jesus. I would. Don't feel sorry for me because I'm a Christian. It's wonderful to know Jesus in this life. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"* (Psalm 23:6).

If you're never been saved, you have existence, but you don't have life. Life is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those three young men sang, "I'm Crucified with Christ, yet I live. Not I, but Christ who lives in me." But now, if you have known that, and somehow you have gotten cold and indifferent, and you've been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, you're foolish to stay that way. You have that sad misery. You have that stinging memory. You are the object of sarcastic mockery by this world. And, you've lost your melody. There's no song. It's time to come home. It's time to be done with this world. It's time for you to make a decision. It's time for you to say, "I'm coming home to God with all of my heart." Remember, if you've been taken captive, God loves you too much to let you be living in the world and have joy at the same time. And, God may even get a great, big old rattlesnake to remind you of what you need to do.

The Sad Case of the Stolen Song

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 22, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 137:1–4

“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?”

PSALMS 137:4

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian
- II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian
- III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian
- IV. The Silenced Melody of a Captured Christian

Conclusion

Introduction

Take God's Word and be finding Psalm 137, as some in the choir are finding their place—Psalm 137. I want to talk to you today on this subject: “The Sad Case of the Stolen Song.”

May I ask you a personal question? Do you have at this moment—now, don't answer the question out loud, but answer it—do you have at this moment “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Peter 1:8)? Or, is there a song in your heart? Was there a song in your heart and has it gone now? Has your song been stolen? Has something taken your song away from you? That's what happened to the children of Israel. God gave them a land, and God gave them a law, and God gave them a Lord. But, in disobedience they defiled the land; they defied the law; they denied the Lord. And, when they did, God raised up the Babylonians to carry them away to Babylon. They lived there in captivity. They lived there in sadness, and their song was gone. And, Psalm 137 refers to that. Look at it: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*” Zion is just another name for Jerusalem. “*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?*” (Psalm 137:1–4). Here are people who had lost their song. They had gotten into captivity, and the song was gone.

Max Lucado tells this story. Listen. “Chippy, the parakeet, never saw it coming. One

second he was peacefully perched in his cage; the next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippy's owner decided to clean Chippy's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She had barely said *hello* when Chippy got sucked in. The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippy still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippy under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippy was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do: she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippy never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, the reporter who had initially written about the event contacted Chippy's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippy doesn't sing anymore. He just sits and stares." Well, no wonder. Sucked in, washed over, and blown with hot air: no wonder that's what he does. He'd lost his song.

But, you know, there are a lot of Christians who have done that. They've lost their song. Not just Israel of old, and not just the parakeet, but some in this auditorium, you have lost your song, because you have been taken captive not by the Babylonians, but by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, Babylon represents the world with its vexation, its vileness, and its vanity. Israel—and Jerusalem in particular—represents the Lord. It's not the hellish city; it's the holy city, with its saints and its sweetness and its song and its salvation. And, here God's people have been taken from Jerusalem down to Babylon. It's the sad story of saints in exile, saints taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. But, today, in a spiritual sense, we have a lot of people sitting out listening to me today who are believers in Babylon.

Now, let me describe to you why it is such a sad case. I want to lay four things on your heart.

I. The Sad Misery of a Captured Christian

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the sad misery—the sad misery of a captured Christian. Look in verse 1 again of this Psalm. "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept*" (Psalm 137:1). Underscore that. Here they are in misery, here they are in captivity, and they are weeping. They're miserable. Why? Because their song is gone.

Now, you know, one of the ways that you can tell that you're truly saved is this: that if you're taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, there's sorrow in your heart. Some people never know this sorrow. Do you know why they never know this sorrow?

They have never been saved. They're at Babylon to begin with. But, if you're a child of God, and you've been taken captive, and you're living in exile, I can tell you that God loves you too much to let you have joy and to be in captivity at the same time. And, God will engineer the fact that you have no joy. *The most miserable man or woman in the world is not a lost man or woman; the most miserable person in this world—listen to me—the most miserable person in this world is a Christian out of fellowship with God—more miserable than an unsaved person.*

Now, they may laugh. The unsaved may laugh, but the Bible calls that, in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 6, like the “*crackling of thorns under a pot*” (Ecclesiastes 7:6). We have a generation today that's laughing its way into Hell. They won't laugh their way out once they get there. But, friend, laughter is not the joy that I'm talking about, nor even happiness. Happiness depends upon what happens. As I've often told you, it's like the surface of the sea that's blown by the winds. But, joy is down deep, many fathoms deep, and the winds never touch the joy that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it's wonderful when happiness and joy co-mingle, but if there's no happiness, you need the joy. The joy doesn't necessarily remove the pain, but it helps you to bear it. Success does not bring joy; it may bring misery. Do you know what a good definition of failure is? It is succeeding at the wrong thing. Success has a law of diminishing returns, because when a person does not have it, they think if they achieve it, they'll have joy. And, if they do achieve it, they understand that it doesn't bring joy. And, that's the reason so many rock stars and so many movie idols and so many multimillionaires take their own life: because they have it all, and they realize they have nothing.

I heard about Johnny who loved pancakes so much. He asked his mother for another pancake, another pancake, another pancake. One morning she decided she'd give Johnny all the pancakes he wanted. So, she got the griddle there, and he ate pancakes. She said, “Do you want another one?” “Yes, ma'am.” “You want another one?” “Yes, ma'am.” “You want another one?” “Yes, ma'am.” “You want another one?” “Yes, ma'am.” Finally, she said, “Johnny, you want another pancake?” He said, “No, ma'am. I don't want the ones I've already had.” That's what this world does for us. This world has no joy.

Friend, it was God that engineered the misery of these people. Have you ever thought about God engineering your misery? Have you? Listen. Put in your margin Jeremiah 25. You can turn to it if you want to. Let's begin reading about verse 8: “*Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar*”—listen to this phrase—“*the king of Babylon, my servant,*”—now, Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king. He was the one who was going to come down and

take the children of Israel captive and carry them away to Babylon. And, notice that God called him His servant: *“my servant.”* Well, why was he God’s servant? Because he was doing something to God’s people that would ultimately be a blessing to God’s people—*“and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover”*—listen to this—*“I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle”* (Jeremiah 25:8–10). God says, “I’m going to take that from you. I’m going to take your joy from you. I’m going to take your song from you. I will do that.” Why? “Because you would not hear the words of My prophets.”

Now, let me share with you a story. Once upon a time, there was a family of wayward members of a church. At one time they were active members, but had lost all interest and had fallen away. The deacons had talked to the father and his sons, Jim, John, and Sam, about their condition. The preachers had visited them. And, many of the brethren had tried to get them back to the church. But all failed. But, one day when the boys were out in the pasture, a large rattlesnake bit John, and he became very ill. A physician was called, and after an examination he pronounced John to be in critical condition. The doctor said, “About all you can do now is pray,” and he went his way.

The father called the preacher and told him of John’s condition and asked him to pray for John. This was the preacher’s prayer: “O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thy wisdom Thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite John in order to bring him to his senses. He’s not been inside the church house for years, and it is doubtful in all that time that he has felt the need of prayer. Now, we trust that this will be a valuable lesson to him that will lead him to genuine repentance. And now, O Father, wilt Thou send another snake to bite Sam, and another to bite Jim, and a big one to bite the old man. We’ve been doing everything we know for years to restore them, but to no avail. It seems that all of our combined efforts could not do what this snake has done. Thus, we conclude that the only thing that will do this family any good is more rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Well, it’s a little humorous, but in a sense Nebuchadnezzar was God’s rattlesnake to bring these people to their senses, because they had defiled the land, defied the law, denied the Lord, and God brings them into captivity. And, it is God Himself who engineered their misery. God did that. Nebuchadnezzar was God’s rattlesnake. He called him, *“my servant.”*

II. The Stinging Memory of a Captured Christian

Now, here’s the second thing I want you to notice. Not only the sad misery, but I want

you to notice the stinging memory—the stinging memory—of a captured Christian. Notice verse 1 again—Psalm 137, verse 1: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137:1). Now, remember Zion speaks of salvation, service, songs, joy, victory. It speaks of deliverance. These were God’s chosen people in God’s heavenly city, and they remember this. Now, every real Christian who has backslidden, been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, has a memory. He remembers a time when Jesus was sweet and when Jesus was real.

Now, Babylon has its thrills, but it doesn’t have Jesus. Babylon may have its beauty, but it doesn’t have Jesus. Now, you may be in the world, the flesh, and the devil, and not weep. But, don’t brag about it. It’s only because you’ve never been saved. It’s because you have no memory. The Apostle John speaks of people like this, and he says, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us”* (1 John 2:19).

We have people who waltz down an aisle, join a church, get baptized, and then go back to the world, but they have no memory of Jesus. They may have a memory of joining a church somewhere, but I’m telling you, my dear friend, if you’ve ever known the Christ of Calvary, if you’ve ever known the *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8) that the Holy Ghost gives, if you’ve ever known peace that passeth understanding (Philippians 4:7), if you’ve ever known the songs that Jesus Christ gives, if you’ve ever known that and you get away, there is a lingering memory. There is a memory of what used to be in your heart.

Do you have a time and a place where Jesus Christ was real to you? Do you remember that time? I hope you do. We sang, and I was thinking about it, Brother Jim Whitmire, *“My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine,”* and then that phrase comes, *“If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus ’tis now”* (William R. Featherston). Can you say that? Can you say that the presence of Jesus this moment is real in your heart? Answer the question. Don’t answer it out loud, but answer it. You see, if you’ve known the Lord and you’ve gotten away from the Lord, then there is that sad misery because of that stinging memory that you once knew.

III. The Sarcastic Mockery of a Captured Christian

Now, here’s the third thing I want you to see, and that’s the sarcastic mockery of a captured Christian. Look, if you will, in verses 2 and 3 of this chapter: *“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof”—that is, in the middle of Babylon. “For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion”* (Psalm 137:2–3). Now remember they worshiped their false gods, their filthy idols, and now here are the

people of God, and they're saying to them in sarcasm, "Hey, you servants of your mighty God. Sing us one of your songs." What this is is mockery. What this is is a chance for the enemy to blaspheme because a child of God, a man, or a woman, someone who once knew the Lord, is now away from the Lord, and the enemy now rejoices so much.

That's what they did to Samson—Samson, the heavyweight champion in the Old Testament who lost his crown and became the plaything of the Philistines. They put Samson there grinding in the mill, and they laughed, and they mocked, and the enemies of God now rejoiced. Do you know that the world would rejoice if there were difficulties in this church? Do you know the world would rejoice if you or I or some of those of us who are leaders were to lower our testimony? They'd say, "There they go. They're just like us." You see, the world loves to blur the distinction between Jerusalem and Babylon. "Sing us one of your songs."

Now, friend, we can sing to Babylon, but we can never sing for Babylon. We have these Christian entertainers who want to sing in church on Sunday morning when they sang in the nightclub on Saturday night. Not for me, they can't. That's casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). We don't do that. Oh, we can sing to Babylon, but not sing for Babylon, not make a mockery of the holy things of God. But, it happens far too often. God forbid that we should blur the distinction between Jerusalem and Babylon. God forbid that we should ever be a mockery to the things of God, amen? Don't you give the enemy an occasion to blaspheme.

IV. The Silenced Melody of a Captured Christian

The fourth thing I want you to see this morning is the silenced melody of a captured Christian. The question comes in verse 4, "*How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?*" (Psalm 137:4). That is, "We've been taken captive. Since we've been taken captive, how can we sing the Lord's song?" You see, what is the Lord's song? The Lord's song is the song of deliverance.

Now, if you're captive, you're not delivered; therefore, you don't have a song. Listen to this Psalm—Psalm 32, verse 7: "*Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.*" And then, He says, "*Selah*" (Psalm 32:7). That means, "Think about that." Songs of deliverance. Do you know the first public song recorded in the Bible was the song of Moses and the Lamb? Well, what was the song of Moses and the Lamb? The song of Moses and the Lamb was the song that Israel sang as they came out of bondage and were delivered from Egypt and came through by the blood of the Lamb into victory. And, as they came out of the Red Sea they sang the song, the first recorded song in the Bible, the song of Moses and the Lamb. And what was it? It was a song of deliverance for God had

delivered them (Exodus 15:1–21; Revelation 15:3).

Now, if you're singing in bondage, you can't sing the Lord's song, because it's a song of deliverance. But, if you've been delivered, you can't help but sing. Psalm 40, verses 2 and 3: "*He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock,*"—has He done that for you? Then, listen—"*and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD*" (Psalm 40:2–3). It's the song of the soul set free. It's the song of deliverance.

Now, you never expect to get this song from people in bondage. They may make musical sounds, but they cannot sing with melody in their heart to the Lord.

*Let those refuse to sing
Who never knew our God;
But [children] of the heavenly King,
But [children] of the heavenly King
May [sing] their joys abroad.*

—ISAAC WATTS

I see people in church sometimes during the song service. Do you know I watch you? Have you ever thought about the fact that when I'm up here you can see me? Well, then, don't you think I can see you? And, I watch people in the song service, and some of them sit there like a totem pole and never sing a word, and, I say, "Why not?" One man said to a deacon, "Brother Jones, would you please stand and lead us in a word of criticism?" "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our Lord." We're going to sing.

Now, I sing. As a matter of fact, I sing solos. You didn't know that, because you're not with me in the car when I'm alone and the windows rolled up. But, I sing to the Lord. And, do you know what? God enjoys my singing as much as He enjoys Jim's singing, because I'm singing to the Lord. Somebody said to me, "Adrian, you're a prisoner singer: always behind a few bars, and you can't find the right key." But, friend, if you can carry a tune, you don't have to unload it. I mean, if it's in your heart. The Bible says in Ephesians 5 that when we're filled with the Spirit, we're singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). And, there's a song—when Jesus is there, somebody has described joy as the flag that is flown from the castle of the heart when the King is in residence.

I asked myself this question this morning before I preached this sermon, because I don't want to be a hypocrite: "Adrian, do you have a song? Do you have joy?" And, I thank God I could say, "Yes, I do—yes, I do; *joy unspeakable and full of glory*' (1 Peter 1:8)." You see, if you have a song, suffering cannot steal your song. Jesus, facing dark Gethsemane and bloody Calvary, had the Last Supper with His disciples, and Matthew

26, verse 30, says, “*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives*” (Matthew 26:30). Jesus sang His way to the cross: “*And when they had sung a hymn...*” Paul and Silas in a filthy dungeon, in a Philippian jail, having their backs cut to shreds by the lictor’s lash, in filth and vermin and human sewage, “*At midnight,*” the Bible says, “*Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them*” (Acts 16:25). That’s when they had the earthquake. It was a concert that brought the house down. They had what the Bible calls, in Isaiah 30, verse 29, “a song in the night” (Isaiah 30:29).

Suffering, sorrow, reverse can’t take your song. Some greedy malady eating away at your body can’t take your song. A depleted bank account cannot steal your song. Even a wayward child cannot take away your song, the joy of the Lord that’s in your heart. That’s when you need joy.

Many of you know that Joyce and I had a little boy who died on Mother’s Day, a crib death, a little two-month-old child named Philip. We never faced death before like that. We were in Fort Pierce, Florida. Our hometown was West Palm Beach, Florida, where our parents were. And, Joyce and I had on that Mother’s Day afternoon to drive to West Palm Beach. It’s about sixty miles. And, Joyce is in the choir, and she’ll bear out what I’m about to say. For sixty miles we sang—sixty solid miles—sang to the Lord over and over again songs—songs that we’d heard that now meant more to us than ever before. “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.” “He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No, never alone; no, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.”

I feel sorry for people who don’t have a song. Friend, sorrow, suffering, financial reverse, criticism cannot steal your song. Only one thing can take away your song: it’s when you get taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and you can’t sing God’s song in a strange land. The devil wants to steal your song.

King David was a mighty man of God, but he was taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. And, you know what happened to him? He lost his song. You say, “How do you know, Adrian?” In Psalm 51, verses 14 and 15, he says, “*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness*” (Psalm 51:14). Remember I said the song is the song of deliverance. It’s not the song of a captive. It’s the song of a soul set free. And, when you’re free, you can’t help but sing. You may not be a musician, but you’ll surely be a singer. Your song may not be all that verbalized, but you’ll be doing what the Bible says when you’re filled with the Spirit, “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:19).

You say, “Well, pastor, I’ve been taken captive. Can I come free?” Yes, you can. Jeremiah 24, verses 6 and 7: “*For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will*

bring them again to this land: and will build them... And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:6–7).

Would you like to do that? Is there a lost melody? Is there a lingering memory? Is there, dear friend, a sad misery? Would you like to come home? Would you? Well, you don't have to wonder about whether God will receive you. Isaiah 55, verse 7: *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”* (Isaiah 55:7). And, when you do that, what will happen? Isaiah 55, verse 12: *“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands”* (Isaiah 55:12)—*“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8).

Conclusion

Now, there are two categories—three, really—in this congregation this morning. There are those of you who have the song. You have the song. There's melody in your heart. You're singing. Right now you have peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). You have *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8). Then, there are those of you who once had the song, but you've been taken captive. You know who you are. Now, you may look very holy this morning. You may have a nice Bible and a beatific smile, but God sees your heart, and so do you. You once had the song, but you've lost it. You've been taken captive by the world, the flesh, and the devil. There are some like that. And then, there are some here this morning who never knew the song. You don't even know what I'm talking about, because you've never been delivered; you've never been saved. You're drawing your breath, drawing your salary, fighting to live, and living to fight, and on your way to Hell. You've never known the song.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. To those of you who know the song, thank God for it, and begin to pray for those 'round about you, not in self-righteousness, but in gratefulness. Those of you who once knew the song, would you say, “I've wandered far away from God, but now I'm coming home. Lord Jesus, I turn from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Lord, one more time, I turn to You. I believe You, Lord, when You said, *‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him...for he will abundantly pardon’* (Isaiah 55:7). Please, dear God, do that for me today.” Ask Him for it. And then, those of you who've never known the song, what a sad way to live! What a terrible way to die! Would you like to be delivered? Would you like to know Jesus? May I lead you in a prayer? Would you pray this way, and pray it sincerely: “Dear God”—that's right. Just speak to Him out of your heart—“Dear God, I am a sinner. I am lost. I need deliverance.

I need to be saved. I need to be forgiven. I need to be cleansed. I need peace with You. I need the song. Lord Jesus, You died to save me. You shed Your blood on the cross for me. You were raised from the dead. You are willing and able to save me if I will trust You. I do trust You. I open my heart. I receive You by faith as my Lord and Savior. I yield my life to You. I turn from my wicked way and give You my life right now; right now, by an act of my will, in faith, I trust You and You only to save me. Thank You for doing it. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I stand on Your Word. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be. Give me the courage to make it public this morning, and help me never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Amen."

Proof Positive That Elvis Is Alive and O.J. Will Get a Fair Trial

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 29, 1995

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 139

“O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.”

PSALMS 139:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Judge Knows All About You
 - A. He Knows Your Character
 - B. He Knows Your Thoughts
 - C. He Knows Your Deeds
 - D. He Knows Your Words
 - E. He Knows Your Genetics
 - II. The Judge Is Inescapable
 - III. The Judge Is All-Knowing, All-Loving, and Totally Righteous
- Conclusion

Introduction

Would you be finding in your Bibles Psalm 139, and when you've found it, look up here—Psalm 139.

The day was Friday, June 17, 1994. And, most of us remember that day because we sat transfixed before the television for two hours. And, there in Los Angeles on Interstate 5 the crowds lined the shoulders, stood on the overpasses. Some of them were cheering, some of them were holding up signs, and they were saying and chanting, “Run, O. J., run!” And, there going down that freeway was a white Bronco. These people who had yelled the same thing and given the same cheer in the Rose Bowl were now cheering this famous football player. And, it seemed as if the chase were in slow motion. Driving that Bronco was a man named Al Cowling, and in the back seat was a celebrity named O. J. Simpson. He had pressed up against his heart and his chest, looking at it from time to time, a picture of family members that he loved. But, at the same time, he had a gun pointed toward his head, and he was keeping the police at bay by holding himself hostage.

Now, there had been a brutal murder, and O. J. Simpson was a suspect. And, he was to turn himself in. And, the police waited, and he didn't show. He didn't turn himself in, so they began to look for him. And, somehow they found out that he was there in that Bronco. And, it seemed as if time slowed down. I mean, we sat there and we looked at a fantasy, or what seemed to be a fantasy but was reality, that was more wild and weird than most of any fantasy that we've seen in make-believe television. O. J. Simpson finally ended back up at the mansion where he lived. Police were there. And, he was arrested and charged as a suspect in the brutal murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Simpson, and another young man, Ron Goldman. They'd been found brutally murdered on the steps of Nicole's townhome. The police were asked, "Why did you not arrest O. J. Simpson when you first learned that he was a suspect? Why didn't you go after him immediately?" And, they said, "We didn't think he would run." But, he did run. As a matter of fact, O. J. Simpson seemed to have been born to run.

When he was a little boy, he learned to run. He was raised in a tough and a rough neighborhood in San Francisco. His father left his mother when O. J. was just very small, and his mother tried to raise him without some male help in the home. And, that's tragic in itself. And, so many fathers today are doing that. People say, "Well, I owe it to myself to have my own happiness." And, we live in a *me* generation. I believe that parents ought to go through any sacrifice, even if father and mother are not always just so happy, for the sake of those children.

Now, the indications are that O. J. Simpson's mother was a godly woman, is a godly woman; did her best to raise this boy for God, did all that she could do. And, I want to say also, God bless those parents who are single parents. I've met some of them today who are doing their very best to raise boys and girls to do right. Many of them have incredible burdens. And, that is why this church has a ministry to single parents and care groups. And, that is why we're doing what we're doing in pledging and planning to do so much more.

But, O. J. Simpson, raised in that neighborhood, had rickets, a disease that caused him to have bowlegs. But, for some reason it didn't slow him down. He found out that he could run like the wind. He had incredible talent. So, when he went to high school there at Galileo High School in San Francisco, that was a school that had had not much of a football program till O. J. Simpson got there. And, then they began to win game after game after game. And, O. J. Simpson found out that he had the ability to be a leader. So, he formed a social club called The Superiors. Then, he formed another club, or led another club. I don't guess you could call it a social club. They were called The Persian Warriors. But, he led as a leader and had a big following. He was a football star. During this time, he met and became a friend—a lifelong friend—to Al Cowling, the man driving the Bronco.

O. J. began to run as a boy, and he continued to run. He got a full football scholarship to the University of Southern California. And people used to sit in amazement and watch him run, as I did, and I was amazed. He turned running the football into an art form. He would run with blinding speed. He could move and cut with grace on the field. And, that college became national champions, and O. J. Simpson became an All-American.

And then, at the end of his college career, they were looking for the most outstanding football player in all of America. It was O. J. Simpson. They gave to O. J. Simpson the coveted Heisman Trophy, and many of us remember that, the most outstanding collegiate football player in America. O. J. Simpson was running. But, he'd not stopped running.

Then, the professionals said, "We want you to run," and he was drafted as a professional football player and went to play for Buffalo. And, Buffalo had not had much of a professional time. Buffalo had not had much of a self-consciousness as an important city. But, when O. J. Simpson got there, people in Buffalo began to stick out their chest and feel good, because O. J. Simpson was continuing to run. He was the first man ever to gain 2,000 yards in a single season. He was placed in the Football Hall of Fame.

When his professional football career was over, he didn't stop running. He started running through airports—remember that?—and jumping over baggage, and became a businessman, an entrepreneur, appeared in successful ads and movies; he was a celebrity. Someone called him the superstar of Rent-a-Car, running through airports. And, we all remember that ad with that little lady that says, "Go, O. J., go," and he's running through that airport. Everybody loved O. J. Simpson. He had everything that the world would say could bring a man happiness. He had wealth. He had fame, a beautiful home. He had friends. But, he's still running.

He got married. And, for some reason, his marriage didn't work out, so he cut and ran, left his wife. His life began to be marked by tragedy. He had a little boy that drowned. All of us know tragedies sometime. And, God knows that we hurt. And, God can take a broken heart and mend it if we'll run to Him and not run from Him. But, O. J. Simpson was a man on the run. He met a beautiful young girl named Nicole Brown. She was an 18-year-old high school homecoming queen. She was enamored with the famous O. J. Simpson. They began to live together, Nicole Brown and O. J. Before the first child was born, they got married. And, some people said, "Well, they are now the ideal couple. They have it all. She's beautiful. He's handsome. They're wealthy. They have it all." But, we know now about the 911 calls. We know now about the domestic violence, which is also a tragic problem in America.

On one occasion, when the police came, there had been one of those calls, those

911 calls, and O. J. was accused of abusing this beautiful girl. When the police came, he said, "What's the big deal? We can handle this. We can handle it." And, I think a lot of people think that there are things that they can handle. They don't understand what goes on in the human heart. It was a big deal, but evidently, he didn't think so.

And now, O. J. Simpson is running down the Interstate in Los Angeles. The crime has been committed. Nicole has had her throat slashed. Ron Goldman has been stabbed 22 times. Police detectives said it was one of the most brutal scenes that they've ever seen. And, the evidence seems to point to O. J. Simpson.

Now, let's look at the Scripture. Psalm 139, verse 1: "*O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*" Now, notice verse 7: "*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*" (Psalm 139:1-7). Let's put it that way: "Whither shall I run from thy presence?" O. J., a man on the run, who will never be able to outrun God.

Then, we come to another question. That question is: What about Elvis? Is Elvis alive? Well, members of the Elvis Fan Club seem to think so here at Graceland. On October 7th, we had some people from Mobile, Alabama. They came, expecting Elvis to show up again, because they said October 7th was the day that had the right number for his return. Now, here's the way they figured it up. They said, "If you take the day of Elvis' death, 8/16/1977 and then take that day, October 7, 1994, and add them together, that comes up to 2001." And Elvis's concerts often began with the theme music from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. So, it just figures that's the day he's going to show up. I mean, anybody could figure that out. And, you know, what they figured was this: that Elvis really didn't die in 1977. He just staged his death because of the pressures of fame. And, they said he was like a monkey in a cage. And so, now he's somewhere, but he will show up. And, they were a little disappointed when he did not show up on October 7th.

And, you know, there are a lot of people who say they've seen Elvis. One man reported, "He sat right beside me on a UFO." And, Charles Lowery said, he said, "I read in a newspaper, one of those tabloids, as I was checking out the grocery store, that Elvis was alive." He said, "It was right under the article that said, 'I ate the shark that ate my wife.'" And, right underneath that there was a newspaper story that said, of course, that Elvis is alive. His fans want to think that somewhere he is alive, enjoying all that money with another beautiful woman. It's hard for them to admit that he died.

Well, the Psalm that I have before you is proof positive that Elvis is alive and that O.

J. Simpson will get a fair trial. And, O. J. Simpson will stand before a judge one day—not Judge Ito; he will stand before Almighty God. And, so will I. And, so will you. And at that time, there will be a trial, and it will be fair.

Notice how this Psalm ends in verse 23: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23–24). I want you to notice this Judge, the Judge that the Psalmist is talking about.

I. The Judge Knows All About You

And, I want you to see the advantage that He has that no other judge has.

A. He Knows Your Character

First of all, He knows your character. Look, if you will, in 139, verse 1: “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.” God knows you. God knows O. J. God knows Elvis. He knows your character. There’s a difference between your reputation and your character. Your reputation is what others think about you; your character is what God knows about you. Many people have been shocked to learn some things about O. J. Simpson that they did not know, because this reputation he had on the one hand, and then it seems like the cover has been pulled back, and there’s something else about his private life that indicates a different kind of character than he had in public life. I’m afraid that would be true of many people.

B. He Knows Your Thoughts

But, not only does this judge knows your character; this judge knows your thoughts. Look in verse 2, if you will: *“Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off”* (Psalm 139:2). In God’s book, when you think *lust*, God writes *adultery*. When you think *hate*, God writes *murder*.

C. He Knows Your Deeds

Now, you may never have overtly committed these crimes, but God knows your character. God knows your thoughts. God knows your deeds. Look, if you will, in verse 2 again: *“Thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising”* (Psalm 139:2). God saw you when you sat in that chair tonight. Notice in verse 3: *“Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways”* (Psalm 139:3). God saw that murder committed. There was an eyewitness. When David committed adultery, David said, *“Against thee, thee only, have I...done this evil”*—and committed this sin, or this evil—*“in thy sight”* (Psalm 51:4). God saw it all. He knows your deeds.

D. He Knows Your Words

God knows yours words. He knows who’s lying on the witness stand, and who is not.

Look in verse 4: *“For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether”* (Psalm 139:4). He knows your character. He knows your thoughts. He knows your deeds. He knows your words. *“Every idle word that men speak will they give an account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). Not a word that you’ve ever uttered has ever been obliterated. God keeps the record. He knows our words.

E. He Knows Your Genetics

Now, here’s an interesting thing. He knows your genetics. Look, if you will, in verse 13 of this same chapter: *“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance; yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them”* (Psalm 139:13–16). Some translations give that, *“My future was written.”* But, the indication, the implication, is the same: that God knows how you would develop, how the members of your body would develop, because God has a book on you. God has a genetic code on you.

Much of this trial is said to turn on DNA; that is, the genetic code in the blood left at the scene, blood found at the crime scene, blood found in Simpson’s Bronco, and blood found at his estate. And, these forensic experts are going through this blood. They’re looking for a blood match, and they’re trying to find it in a genetic code. That genetic code is enshrouded and enshrined in something called DNA. And, they say that the odds are astronomical that any two human beings could have the same DNA, apart from identical twins.

I thought I’d do some reading on DNA. I was absolutely amazed at what I found. The smallest insect on this earth is made up of millions of living cells. In a human body there are 75 trillion cells in the average man. One of those cells, just one of those 75 trillion cells, is incredibly complex; just one of those cells more complex than the most complex computer ever built, and there are 75 trillion of them in an average body. And then, each cell itself is a world brimming with as many as 200 trillion tiny groups called atoms. I want you to think about this now. We’re just talking about one of those cells, and in just one of those cells 200 trillion little tiny groups of atoms called protein molecules, and each of those cells is a micro-universe in itself. And, we’re talking about 75 trillion of them in a body.

Now, the largest molecule is what they call DNA. And, that’s what a lot of this trial has to do with. I’m not sure I can ever pronounce it. That’s the reason why they call it DNA—deoxyribonucleic acid. I got it out. I’ll not say it again. DNA, it is the genetic code

that is built uniquely into you. And, it is that code that determines, when your members are written, what you will become, whether you will be man or a mushroom, a dandelion or a dinosaur. It's all in the DNA.

And, if you were to take one strand of DNA, and unravel it, and stretch it out, it would be about 6 feet in length. And yet, if you were to take all of the DNA in the human body and put it in a box, you could put it in a box about the size of an ice cube. But now, listen to this. There are so many of these little DNA strands in your body, if you were to stretch them out end to end—I had to read this statement several times to make certain I was getting it right, because I said, “That can't be”—if you were to take them and stretch them out, they would go from earth to the sun and back 400 times. That's you. You didn't know you were that long, did you? In you, I'm talking about these little strands of DNA that are wrapped up in these trillions of cells in your body, unbelievably complex. You know, “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God*” (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). And, each one of these has a unique genetic code. Each of the 75 trillion cells in your body has this same genetic code, whether in your ear or in your big toe, and it has all of the data for making another physically identical to yourself.

Now, that's the Judge that O. J. will stand before. And, so will I. And, so will every living person. That is the Judge, according to this Psalm, who knows your character. He knows your thoughts. He knows your deeds. He knows your words. He knows your genetics. That's what the Psalmist says about this Judge.

II. The Judge Is Inescapable

Now, here's something else he says about this Judge. You can't run from this Judge. There's no way that you can escape Him. Begin reading in verse 8: “*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:*”—no matter how high you go, no matter how far from Planet Earth you may go, you can't outrun God. To try to ascend to Heaven to get away from God would be like going to the sun to get away from the heat. There's God. In the depth of Hell God is there. Look, if you will, in verse 8—“*if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there*” (Psalm 139:8). Did you know that God, not the devil, rules Hell? Don't ever get the idea that the devil is the lord of Hell. He is not. And, you can go to Hell, but you will not outrun God. The Bible says, “*Every knee shall bow,*”—listen to it—“*of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*” (Philippians 2:10). Did you know that even in Hell they must “*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Philippians 2:11)? The height of Heaven, the depth of Hell, the ends of the earth. Look in verse 9: “*If I [were to] take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me*” (Psalm 139:9). “*The wings of the morning*”: what's he talking about? He's talking about the sunrise that sheds its rays across the horizon. The Psalmist said, “I'd like hijack a light

beam and get out of here. If I could take the wings of the morning, travel at 186,000 miles per second somewhere across that sea; maybe if I could just get away...”

You go in the airports today, people are traveling. You wonder where they are all going. Many of them are running—running for something, or running from something—trying to find peace. Learn this: everywhere you go, you take yourself with you; and, when you get there, you’ll find God. Everywhere you go, you must take yourself with you; and, when you get there, you will find God. You will not fool this God, and you cannot outrun this God.

And, even if you get in the dark, and try to hide in the dark, it will do you no good. Look, if you will, in verse 11: *“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee”* (Psalm 139:11–12). God doesn’t have to have light to see. The light’s just there to rest your eyes and to rest your body. It is not there so God can see. God sees through the dark. I said, in verse 1, God knows your character. And, by the way, character is what you are in the dark. Put it down big. Put it down plain and straight. You cannot outwit God. You cannot outdistance God. You can’t outlive the inescapable, inevitable, unavoidable God.

If you were to go down here to Cape Kennedy and take a missile, and go into the stratosphere, and beyond the stratosphere and the ionosphere to outer space, God would be there. If you could bore down deeper into the molten core of this earth further than ever a person has been, God would be there. If, at your death, you were to have your body cremated, and have those ashes scattered, yet, your spirit bare and naked would stand in the presence of God. There’s no way you can escape God.

A heathen philosopher was talking to a Christian. He said, “I want to ask you a question: Where is God?” The Christian said, “The better question is: Where is God not?” God is everywhere.

III. The Judge Is All-Knowing, All-Loving, and Totally Righteous

Now, here’s the third thing I want to say. This judge knows all about you. This judge is inescapable. And, this judge, here’s the third thing: He is all-knowing, all-loving, and totally righteous. Begin to look, if you will now, in verse 17. Here’s what the Psalmist says: *“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee”* (Psalm 139:17–18).

The idea of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God—does that frighten you or does it comfort you? Well, if you’re saved, it comforts you. You say, “God is everywhere. He will never abandon me. I’ll never get away from His love. I’ll never get away from His mercy.” And, he compares God’s mercy to the sand of the seashore. Pick up a grain of

sand. It's very light. It has almost no weight. You can hardly feel it in the palm of your hand, if you can feel it at all. But many grains of sand together are an enormous weight. And, if you'll look at one little incident, one little facet of the love of God, that's one thing. But, oh, friend, to think of the multifaceted, incredibly complex mercies of God! We say, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one." The truth of the matter is we cannot count them.

And, if I had a chance to speak to O. J. Simpson, I would say, "O. J. Simpson, if you're guilty of this, or if you're not guilty of this, there is mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, if I say that, some people think that God should have no mercy for a murderer. And, I'm not saying that O. J. is or is not. But, I'm saying, whoever you are, whatever you've done, the deepest, darkest, most horrible sin, God is a God of mercy, who will cleanse and forgive. And, if Jesus Christ did not die for the murder of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman, He didn't die for anything. He died for every rape, for every murder, for every blasphemy, for all arson and pillage, whatever it is. You can name the sin, and I can write across it, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

And, I'll tell you something else. This is a God who is infinite love, but a God who is absolutely just. Do you think when I say that, that God is soft on sin? No. Continue to read. Look in verse 19: "*Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do I not hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies*" (Psalm 139:19–22). Why are they my enemies? Because they're God's enemies. "And, I'm not a friend to those who hate God," the Psalmist says. He's not talking about a man now who comes to God for forgiveness; he's talking about bloody people who hate God, and strike out at God, and blaspheme God. The Bible says of this Judge that He will not at all acquit the wicked. God never has and God never will let sin go unpunished. And, ultimately, all sin is against God.

I put this verse down. You may want to put it in your margin. It's Acts chapter 17, verses 30 and 31: "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he*"—God—"hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). Who is the judge? Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Will O. J. get a fair trial? Absolutely! Will you get a fair trial? Yes! God "*hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.*" It will be a fair trial. And, who is the One that sits upon the bench? Jesus Christ, the One who today wants to be the

Savior, will in that day be the Judge, and He will judge with absolutely justice. In that day, there will be no mercy. If you want mercy, you may have it. If you want forgiveness, you may have it. If you want grace, you may have it. But, you'll not have it then. And, I want you to notice how Paul argues. He says, God has *“appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;”*—who's the man whose going to be doing the judging? Well, he describes Him—*“whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead.”* Who did God raise from the dead? The Lord Jesus. Now, here is the implication. You cannot hold court if the judge is dead. You cannot hold court if the defendant is dead. The God who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise up every man to be Judge.

Suppose O. J. had pulled the trigger while he rode in the back seat of that Bronco? Would he have escaped judgment? No. God has given assurance unto all men of judgment, in that He raised Jesus Christ from the grave. And, the same God that raised Christ from the grave will raise every man from the grave—that is, his body—in order that that man might be judged.

Now, let's go back to another question. What about Elvis? “Pastor, you said proof positive that Elvis is alive.” Well, he is. He could no more cease to exist than God could cease to exist. Elvis is in one of three places. Either he's in Heaven, or Hell, or still on this earth, but he's never ceased to exist. Isn't that true? Now, his body may be in the grave, but Elvis is somewhere. And, if he didn't get saved, he's in Hell. If he got saved, he's in Heaven, unless he never really died. You say, “Pastor, I want to ask you the big question. Do you think O. J. is guilty? And, do you think Elvis is still alive physically?” I have some strong opinions. I have some very strong opinions. But, I am not the judge. There is a Judge. And I can tell you beyond the shadow of any doubt or peradventure, the Judge of all Heaven and Earth will do right.

And, I pick up the newspaper sometimes and I read about crimes and people who get away, and I read about weak sentences, and what I consider to be sometimes unfair sentences—I just say, “We'll wait, Lord; we'll wait.” *“Vengeance is mine...saith the Lord”* (Romans 12:19).

Whether or not there's a fair trial on this earth, I'll tell you, friend, you cannot read Psalm 139 without coming to this conclusion and praying this prayer in verse 23: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23). And, the prayer is: “Dear Lord, I want to come to court now. I want to throw myself on the mercy of the court, and I want to receive Your forgiveness through Jesus Christ as my Lord and as my Savior.”

And many of us want to know is O. J. guilty? Is Elvis alive? The greater question is: Are you saved? And, do you have everlasting life?

The Glory of God's Presence

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: July 16, 1989

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 139

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

PSALMS 139:7

Outline

Introduction

I. The Places of His Presence

A. God Is Everywhere

1. There Is Not a Movement But What He Sees It
2. There Is Not a Motive But What He Knows It
3. There Is Not a Murmur But What He Hears It

B. Death Cannot Hide Us from God

C. Distance Cannot Hide Us from God

D. Darkness Cannot Hide Us from God

II. The Power of His Presence

A. When You Are Discouraged, His Presence Will See You Through

B. When You Are Lonely, His Presence Will Cheer You Up

C. When You Are Worried, His Presence Will Calm You Down

D. When You Are Tempted, His Presence Will Help You Out

III. The Practice of His Presence

A. Consciously Think About His Presence

B. Carry On a Constant Conversation with God

C. Develop a Spirit of Praise

Conclusion

Introduction

Where is God when I really need Him? Why is God so far away? May I tell you, dear friend, God has never been far away from you. You may have been far away from Him, but God is never far away from you. I want to speak to you today on this subject: "The Glory of His Presence." I want you to look here in Psalm 139, and we're going to jump right into the middle of verse 7: *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"* (Psalm 139:7–10).

Now, friend, there is a truth that if we can get riveted into your soul, embedded into your psyche, and blended into your spirit, it will change your life. And, that is a doctrine that the theologians call the *omnipresence* of God. I just want to call it the *nearness* of God: “The Glory of His Presence.”

I want you to think of three things with me this morning.

I. The Places of His Presence

First of all, I want you to think of the places of His presence.

A. God Is Everywhere

Has it ever dawned on you that God never has to go anywhere? He never has to go anywhere. God is everywhere. Last night I read this verse, Jeremiah 23:24: “*Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.*” It’s impossible for us to be in two places at one time, but not God. God fills Heaven and Earth.

Sometimes we get the idea that God is at church. When I was little boy, we used to go to church, and right over the front door of the church it said, “*The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him*” (Habakkuk 2:20). And, I had the idea that’s where God dwelt: inside there. I came out here where He was not. I went inside where He was. But, what did Paul say in Acts chapter 17? “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands*” (Acts 17:24). He went on to say, in Acts 17:28, “*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring*” (Acts 17:28). That is, God is everywhere.

Now, surely He’s here. But He’s not just here. He’s out there also, isn’t He? There’s nowhere where God is not. Sometimes you hear a man when he comes into church and he gets that stained-glass voice. He talks like he’s got a steeple stuck in his throat. And, we get so holy, you know, and I hear these fellows: one moment they’re very natural, and then they stand up, and they begin to pray, and they say, “O Lord, we come into thy presence.” I say, “I wonder where He’s been.” I mean, now we’re suddenly entering into the presence of God.

Oh, my dear friend, one thing we need to learn is that God is everywhere. There is no place that God is not. Now, let’s look at the Scripture here. Psalm 139:1 says, “*O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.*” Do you see the word searched? The word searched means, “pierced through.” That is, God sees right through you. Now, that can be thrilling or that can be threatening. I want to tell you, He sees through you today.

1. There Is Not a Movement But What He Sees It

Now, look at Psalm 139:2–3: “*Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising... Thou*

compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.” Put this thought in your heart and in your mind. There is not a movement but what He sees it. When you went to bed last night, He saw it. When you got up this morning, He saw it. When you came to church this day, He saw it. As you sit there, He sees it.

I have a preacher friend whose name is Peter Lord. He’s a little eccentric. He’s a dear friend. But, you never know what Peter’s going to do. He’s preached here, and some of you have heard him. One time Peter was preaching on the subject of how the presence of God is everywhere. And, do you know what he did? He got up in the attic of his church, got a microphone up there, and made a little hole in the ceiling. Sunday morning after the choir sang, and they’d sung and everything, he said, “Hello, folks. This is your pastor.” Well, they looked around. They didn’t know where he was. There was no one in the pulpit. He said, “Well, I know you can’t see me, but I can see you.” He said, “Ms. Jones,” he said, “I see you scratching your ear.” She put her hand down. He said, “Mr. Smith, I see you fumbling with your watch.” They were all looking around. They didn’t know where he was. But, from his vantage point, he could see every movement they made. And, he reminded them that the Almighty sees everything.

As he says here in verses 2 and 3, *“Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.”*

2. There Is Not a Motive But What He Knows It

Put it in your mind. There is not a movement but what He sees it. Number two—listen, dear friend: There is not a motive but what He knows it. Notice in verse 2: *“Thou understandest my thought afar off.”* Not only does He see what you do; He knows what you’re thinking. He knows what you’re thinking this very moment; He’s reading your thoughts. In Matthew chapter 12, the Bible says of the Lord Jesus, He *“knew their thoughts”* (Matthew 12:25). There’s not a courtroom in the world that would convict you of a crime if a witness said, “This man thought thus and such.” There’s no way anybody else can know your thoughts. But I’m telling you, dear friend, it is a sobering thought to know that God knows our thoughts. He knows our motives.

3. There Is Not a Murmur But What He Hears It

There’s not a movement but what He sees it. There’s not a motive but what He knows it. And, my dear friend, there is not a murmur but what He hears it. Notice in Psalm 139:4: *“For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.”* Every word that you speak, God knows. He is the silent listener to every conversation. You think about that, because the Bible says, *“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12:36). Every word, every word—He knows every word we say.

You think about that. Somebody said, “If you were to write down the words that the

average person speaks in the average day, it would fill a good sized volume.” In a lifetime, we speak enough words to fill a library in a college. I’m not saying it would make reading. I’m just talking about your words. I’ve said before, *“Many things are opened by mistake, but none as frequently as the mouth.”* But, God records.

Do you remember over there in Malachi chapter 3, verse 16, where the Bible says, *“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it”* (Malachi 3:16)? There’s a book of remembrance written for them that feared the Lord. Isn’t that beautiful? Then, when you praise him, every word, every praise, God hears.

What is he saying? He’s saying, my dear friend, there’s not a movement but what He sees it; there is not a motive but what He knows it; there is not a murmur but what He hears it. There’s no way that you can escape from God. There’s no way that you can flee from His presence. Look, if you will, in Psalm 139:5: *“Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.”* Do you see the word *beset*? The word *beset* has the idea of being besieged, like a city that is encompassed by an army; there’s no way to escape. They used to in the old time lay siege upon a city, and the soldiers would just surround the city. That is called *besieging* or *besetting* the city. God is all around you.

And then, He puts his hand on top. He has laid His hand on top. He’s here, He’s here, He’s here, He’s here, and His hand is here. There is no way that you’re going to escape Almighty God. That’s what he’s saying.

Now, look as he goes on to develop this.

B. Death Cannot Hide Us from God

He says death cannot hide us from God. Look in Psalm 139:7–8: *“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”* Death cannot hide you from God. If you die, you’re going to go to Heaven or Hell. And, if you die outside the Lord Jesus Christ, you’ve been running from God, when you open your eyes in the judgment, the first face you’ll see is His. You have a date with Deity. *“It’s appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). You’ve cursed Him behind His back. I wonder if you’re going to curse Him to His face? You are going to meet the Lord face to face.

But, I tell you what a comforting thought to think that when we close our eyes as a child of God in this world and we open our eyes and look into His face, as the songwriter said,

*When, by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in Heaven a place,*

*Just to be there and to look on His face,
O that will be glory for me.*
—CHARLES H. GABRIEL

But, dear friend, you see, death cannot hide us from God.

C. Distance Cannot Hide Us from God

And then, he says, distance cannot hide us from God. Look in verse 9: *“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:9). Now, what he’s saying there is that the wings of the morning, those are the rays of the sun as they come up over the ocean, and they just radiate on those wispy clouds. The Mediterranean was there. David had seen it so many times. He’d look way out across that ocean. Not knowing modern geography, he had no way of knowing how far it was or how great the distance was. But, he said, “If I were to go as far as it goes, to the uttermost part of the sea, on the wings of the morning,”—not on the 747—“just take the wings of the morning and go, wherever it is I get, I’ll meet God there; He’ll be there.”

You see, death cannot hide us from God. Distance cannot hide us from God. You know, it says, *“Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:10). Do you know what the word *hold* means? It literally means, “to snatch.” Ole Jonah ran from God, didn’t he? He took a ship, sailed away from God, from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Tarshish. The Bible says he was asleep there in the belly of that ship, underneath the deck of that ship, and there the hand of God snatched ole Jonah up. There’s no way, mister, that you can hide from God. Distance will not separate you from God.

I had to laugh when I read about the Russian cosmonauts. Do you remember the first ones who went up and went into orbit? They were atheistic Russian cosmonauts. When they came back, they boasted. They said, “Well, we were up there in the heavens, but we didn’t see God.” All he had to do was step outside that capsule and he would have seen Him. Friend, I want to tell you, when you’ve finished from God, He’ll be there waiting for you—He will be. You will not outwit Him or outdistance Him. God is God.

D. Darkness Cannot Hide Us from God

You see, death cannot hide us from God. Distance cannot hide us from God. Now, watch. Darkness cannot hide us from God. Look, if you will, in verses 11 and 12: *“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee”* (Psalm 139:11–12). God sees and God knows in the dark. Jesus said, in John 3:19, *“Men loved darkness rather than light, because their*

deeds were evil.” They won’t come to the light. But, my dear friend, whether you come to the light or not, God sees you in the dark.

Have you ever noticed how people disobey and how they do different things in darkness than they would do in the light? Have you ever been in a theater or somewhere when the lights go out, or in an auditorium when the lights go out, and the little boys start misbehaving? Isn’t it amazing? In New York City in 1977, do you remember when they had that power outage? It was in July, and all the power went out in New York City. The power went out citywide. Do you know what happened in New York City? Over 2,000 stores were vandalized, looted. Over a billion dollars worth of damage was done to New York City, because there was no light. They were in darkness. People were carting off television sets and those things. God saw that. People say, “Hey, nobody can see what I’m doing. No big deal.” God saw it. Everything you do, dear friend, God sees.

I want to tell you, if you’re having a dark and lonely night, God sees you too, and He’s there to take care of you. Thank God for that. I say it’s a thrilling or a threatening thought. It just all depends on your relationship with God.

II. The Power of His Presence

Now, I’m talking to you, number one, about the places of His presence, okay? Now, I want to talk to you secondly about the power of His presence. What does this mean to you? Is it just some sort of a theological nicety we can say, “Yes, God is everywhere”? Or, how does this get down to where we live? I’ve told you that if you’d get this thought burning in your heart, it will transform your life.

Let me mention four things that the power of His presence will do for you.

A. When You Are Discouraged, His Presence Will See You Through

Number one: When I am discouraged, His presence sees me through. Do you ever get discouraged? Nod your head. I mean, do you ever just find yourself in a dark night of the soul? Look in verses 11 and 12: *“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee”* (Psalm 139:11–12).

What is he saying? He is saying, dear friend, that when we are in darkness, it is not darkness to God. So many people, precious and good people, are in darkness right now. I’m talking to people who are so discouraged and are about to give up. You’re about to throw in the towel. You’re about to say, “It’s no use. Nobody cares. Nobody can help me.” My dear friend, I want to tell you that God cares. I see these people today. You’d have to be a Baptist pastor like I am, or a preacher of some denomination, to

know the heartache, the fear, the turmoil, to go into the funeral home, to go to the graveside, to hear those chains as they lower that casket, to see those people as they water that grave with their tears, to stand in the hospital corridors, to hear the surgeon come out and give a bad report, to go into the home and counsel with people who have broken hearts, and severed relationships. They're so discouraged. Friend, I don't know what people do if they don't know the Lord. I don't know how they make it. The truth of the matter is they don't make it.

But, you see, you just have to recognize that God is present when you're in darkness, when it doesn't make sense, and when you can't understand anything. While you can't see through that darkness, He can—when everybody else fails you. Let me show you a wonderful Psalm that's been a great blessing to me—Psalm 116:6: *“The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.”* Now, look at verse 8: *“For thou hast delivered my soul from death,”*—underscore the word death—*“mine eyes from tears,”*—underscore tears—*“and my feet from falling”*—underscore the word *falling*” (Psalm 116:8).

May I tell you that mankind only has three problems, and they're all right there in that one verse: sin, sorrow, and death. Sin is falling. Sorrow is tears. And, death, of course, is death. Those are the three problems that mankind has, and only the presence of Jehovah God is the answer to any of those three problems. Notice what he says in verse 9: *“I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living”* (Psalm 116:9). Not when I go to Heaven: now. I will walk before the Lord. Some translations give it this way: “I will walk in the presence of God in the land of the living.” That is, His presence is going to be so real to me. *“I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted: I said in my haste, All men are liars”* (Psalm 116:10–11). “I came to a place where there was nobody I could depend upon. I came to the place there was nothing that I could count upon. I was made low. And then, I said, I'll walk before God in the land of the living. His presence will cheer me. And, God has delivered my soul from death, my mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.”

B. When You Are Lonely, His Presence Will Cheer You Up

I am telling you, my dear friend—you listen to me—when you learn how to apply the presence of the Lord, when God becomes a bright, living reality to you, and when you're discouraged, His presence will see you through. Secondly, when you are lonely, His presence will cheer you up. Look in Psalm 139:17–18. The Psalmist is thinking; he says, *“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.”*

Do you ever get lonely? Sure you do. The Swiss psychologist, the late Dr. Paul Tournier, said that loneliness is the greatest malady of our age. There are many things that bring loneliness. Death brings loneliness. When your partner or loved ones go, it brings loneliness. Divorce brings loneliness. Division brings loneliness. Disease brings loneliness, when sometimes we are there in that hospital room, and everybody else is gone, and everybody else is going about their business. Sometimes even success can bring loneliness. We've often heard it said, "It's lonely at the top." Old age can bring loneliness—when everybody is going about their way, and they just seem to leave you out. There are many things that cause people to be lonely.

Can you be lonely in a crowd? Sometimes you're the loneliest in a crowd. Everybody else has their friends. You could be in a big church when there is a little group over here talking and a little group over there talking, and you're just standing there. That's the reason why we need to look out and reach out to those who are standing around. Sometimes we're saying, "Oh, what wonderful fellowship we're having," and over there right in our midst is a lonely person. Right there in the middle of the whole thing are plain and lonely people. People are lonely everywhere.

But, you can be alone or not, and that is when you'll practice the presence of the Lord. Let me tell you, dear friend, what His presence does for us. It just simply cheers us when we're so down. Psalm 25:16, David said, "*Have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.*" But, you know what the Lord says in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 5? One of the greatest verses in the Bible, in my estimation. The Lord God says there, in that wonderful, wonderful passage, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5).

When I was a little boy, we used to go to church, and we used to sing this song. We sing it sometimes here today:

*I've seen the lightning flashing,
I've heard the thunder roll.
I've felt sin's breakers dashing,
Which almost conquered my soul.
I've heard the voice of my Savior,
Bidding me still to fight on.
He promised never to leave me,
Never to leave me alone!*

—LUDIE D. PICKETT

Oh, praise God for that! You see, listen. When I am discouraged, His presence sees me through. When I am lonely, His presence cheers me up. I go for a drive with Jesus. I take a walk with Jesus. I read a book with Jesus. Do you know what I'm talking about? He walks with me. He talks with me. He's as real to me as Bob Sorrell and Tommy

Lane. And, you see, He has time for me like there was no one else.

One of the things that I love to do is go to the west coast of Florida over around Bradenton, somewhere like that, and walk on the beach at sunset. Have you ever done that? Have you ever been some place like that when the sun's going down? There are some of the most gorgeous sunsets you'll ever see right there. The pelicans will come flying by, and the birds at sunset. Maybe there will be a boat out there sailing.

But, you watch that lump of liquid gold just kind of drop into the sea. And, just before the sun sets, if the sea is calm, there will come a shimmering pathway from the sun right to you. Have you ever been there and seen that? It's just a golden pathway. And, you'll be here, and then it will come right to you. If you walk a little further, it just follows you. If you go this way, it follows you this way. It's all yours. It doesn't belong to anybody on that beach. It's just pointed right at you. But, a half of mile up there, there's some other people, and it's pointed right at them. It's my private pathway, but it's theirs also.

You know, that's the way the Lord is. I was reading late last night Psalm 16:11, and I was thinking about that when I read this verse: *"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy."* When I am lonely, he cheers me up. *"In thy presence is fullness of joy."*

C. When You Are Worried, His Presence Will Calm You Down

Thirdly, when I am discouraged, He sees me through. When I am lonely, His presence cheers me up. When I am worried, His presence calms me down. Do you ever get worried? Sure you do. Now, David, at this time, he had some enemies. I want you to see what happens here. In Psalm 139:19, he says, *"Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain."*

Listen. There were some people who hated David and did not fear God. He called them bloody men. That is, they wanted to kill him. He had something to worry about. He says, *"Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies"* (Psalm 139:21–22). Now, when he says, "I hate them," it doesn't use the emotional language that we use by *hate*. What the word *hate* means here is, "to choose against." That is, I take a position against these men. And, who was David against? David said, "I'm against those who are against God." But, David went on to say, "Thank God, God is against those who are against me."

You see, when God's enemies become my enemies, my enemies become God's enemies. Now, what David is saying, "Look, Lord. You're here."

When you were a little boy and going to school, was there ever somebody who used to pick on you? When I was going to school, I used to have this kid always picked on

me, this mean kid. And, one day I just turned around and told her, “You leave me alone.” If you go to school when somebody is picking on you, but your dad goes to school with you, or your big brother walks you, you’re not afraid anymore.

See, that’s what David is saying. David is saying, “Look. He is with me. His presence calms me down. His enemies are my enemies. But, my enemies are his enemies. And, I don’t have to worry if God is with me in this trouble. And, just thank God that He just calms me down.”

I was reading late last night from a diary, a book that gave excerpts from the diary of Dr. David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa. Oh, how my heart was blessed as I read this! I want to share it with you. I wrote it down. Dr. Livingstone. This is over 100 years ago. As a matter of fact, he wrote this in his diary. He’s in Africa. He’s in the deepest jungle. He is alone. He is surrounded by savages who are bloodthirsty, and he figures that in the morning they’re going to kill him. And, the date is January 14, 1856. Now, I want you to use your imagination. This is not fiction. There was a man named David Livingstone. He was literally there. This came right out of his diary. It’s not what somebody else said. He’s there in the jungle. He is surrounded by these bloodthirsty savages. Now, he has his journal, he has his diary, and this is what he writes: “January 14, 1856. Evening. Felt much turmoil of spirit in prospect of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and this teeming population knocked on the head by savages tomorrow. But, I read that Jesus said, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ It is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor, so there’s an end of it! I will not cross furtively tonight as I intended. Should such a man as I flee? Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though they may be the last. I feel quite calm now, thank God!” See the old missionary as he closes his journal and goes to sleep in that jungle. Why? The word of a gentleman: “Lo, I am with you.”

Friend, when I am discouraged, His presence sees me through. When I am lonely, His presence cheers me up. When I am worried, His presence calms me down. Psalm 16, verse 8, says, “*I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved*” (Psalm 16:8). God is right there at my right hand. That is what David meant when he said, “*I will fear no evil: for thou art with me*” (Psalm 23:4).

D. When You Are Tempted, His Presence Will Help You Out

Now, one other thing. I’m talking about the power of His presence. When I am tempted, His presence helps me out. Look at Psalm 139:23–24: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” He knew that God already knew his heart, but he’s saying, “God, You show me my heart, You show me my thoughts; search me, and try

me. You see, I want to be led in the right way.” David knew temptation just like you do. But, he’s saying, “Oh, God, You look into me.”

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to do wrong when you know somebody’s watching? You’re a whole lot more apt to eat all the banana pudding if you’re there by yourself. Isn’t that right? But, when somebody is watching, it just has a restraint. And, this is what David is saying: “God, You search me. You know my heart. You look into me. Lord, You’re right here, not only on the outside, but on the inside.” You see, the Bible says, *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (Hebrews 10:13). Have you ever noticed that when people want to commit some vile sin, they slip off somewhere to a motel and lock the door? Hey, friend, you can’t lock God out—you can’t lock God out. Every act God sees. Just that one fact: when you say, “God is here; whatever I do, He’s going to see it.” If you commit adultery, God is watching—God is watching. That’s what broke David’s heart. He said, *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight”* (Psalm 51:4).

III. The Practice of His Presence

Now, one last thing, and I’m going to be finished. I have talked to you about the places of His presence. I have talked about the power of His presence. Let me talk to you very quickly about the practice of His presence. How can you make this real in your life? How can you somehow just get it out of the realm of theory, and how can this really just transform your life? Very briefly, there are three ways.

A. Consciously Think About His Presence

Number one: You need to consciously think about His presence. You need to stop several times a day and just have an oasis of thought and get quiet. Did you know the Bible says, *“Be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10)? Because of the transistor radio, the fast automobile, the tape player, the television, and because of everything else, we’re not still to know that He’s God. Now, David got alone, and he got to thinking about it.

Look in Psalm 139. He says here in this passage, in verse 6, *“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it”* (Psalm 139:6). David is thinking about the fact that God is everywhere. What you need to do is meditate on it, meditate on it, and meditate on it. Read this Psalm over and over again. Have a quiet time with God. Look into the face of God. Tell yourself that God is present.

B. Carry On a Constant Conversation with God

That’s the first thing: a quiet time. The second thing is to carry on a constant

conversation with God. If you'll notice in this Psalm, it is really a conversation with God: "O Lord": verse 1. Verse 2: "Thou." Verse 3: "Thou." Verse 4: "But, lo, O Lord, thou." Verse 5: "Thou." Verse 7: "thy spirit." He's talking to God. He's not talking about God. He's carrying on a conversation with God. Don't just go into your closet and pray. Yes, get down on your knees and pray. But, my dear friend, the Bible also says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And, pray about everything. Talk to God about everything. Not out loud—people will think you've got a screw loose, but just fellowship with God everywhere. And, if you're by yourself, you can talk out loud. Go out to get the paper: "It's raining today, Lord. The paper got wet." You say, "That's silly." Oh no. "In every thing"—in every thing—"by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). Fellowship with Him just as you would with a friend. Take a drive with Him. Take a walk with Him. Have conversation with Him. Share with Him your fears. Share with Him your joys. Talk with the Lord in conversational prayer.

Have you ever heard anybody say, "Well, you know, my prayers never get above the ceiling"? That's part of your problem. God is underneath the ceiling, dear friend. You don't have to shoot your prayers to outer space or blast a prayer to Heaven. You talk with God, not pray at God. Learn to practice like the Psalmist is doing here in Psalm 39; he's just talking with the Lord through conversational prayer. Day by day, in and out, just say, "Lord, thank you for this." Driving the automobile, be aware that He's there. Thank Him, love Him, and enjoy Him.

C. Develop a Spirit of Praise

The third thing is to develop a spirit of praise. Look, if you will again, one more time here in this Psalm. He says here that he is praising the Lord. Psalm 139:14 says, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Just praise God. Just learn to praise Him. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His people. So when you praise Him, God reveals Himself to you. Now, He's always present, but He manifests Himself when we praise. If you're praying and having difficulty praying, begin to praise. You'll have an ocean to swim in. Just praise the Lord.

Conclusion

I'm telling you, friend, when you're discouraged, His presence will see you through. When you're lonely, His presence will cheer you up. When you're worried, His presence will calm you down. And, when you're tempted, His presence will help you out.

Why Do I Exist?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 24, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 139

“O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.”

PSALMS 139:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. God Knows All About You
 - A. God Knows Your Character
 - B. God Knows Your Conduct
 - C. God Knows Your Contemplations
 - D. God Knows Your Conversation
- II. God Is Always With Me
 - A. Death Doesn't Hide Us from God
 - B. Distance Doesn't Hide Us from God
 - C. Darkness Doesn't Hide Us from God
- III. God Has a Wonderful Purpose for Me
- IV. God Has Me Constantly in His Heart

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 139. And, while you're finding it, let me ask you this question. It is a great question, but I want you to ask it for yourself. And here's the question: Why do I exist? What is the purpose of my life? Or, as my friend Peter Lord put it, "Why I?" Why am I here?

Well, in order to know God's purpose for your life, we can go to the Word of God. Now, it is so important that you know the purpose for your life. Anything that does not fulfill its purpose, fulfill its function, is a failure, no matter what it is. Now, the very word *sin* means, "to miss the mark." That's the Greek word *sin*. It is missing the mark like an arrow fails to hit the target. Now, whatever else you may do—whatever else you may do—if you don't find your purpose in life, friend, you are a failure.

Now, what is the purpose of a pen? The purpose of a pen is to write. Now, if the pen won't write—and, many of them don't write—then it hasn't fulfilled its purpose. I'm going to tell you something, friend. I was in a luggage store this weekend, and up there was a display case, and they had some pens in there. They were called Mont Blanc. Is that the

way you pronounce it? I think so. You wouldn't believe what those things cost. I mean, over 100 dollars for a pen. I'm going to tell you something. A 20-cent Bic that writes is better than a 100-dollar Mont Blanc that doesn't. Now, I'm not saying the Mont Blanc won't write. I hope they do, if you pay that much money for them, but I'm saying this: that the purpose of a pen is to write, and no matter what else it does, if it won't write, it is a failure.

Now, listen. God has a plan for your life, and no matter what else you may do, if you don't do what you were designed to do, you are a failure. So, it is very important that we find the purpose in life, that we don't miss the mark. You will never have fulfillment apart from your purpose in life. You will not be fulfilled. God made a bird to fly in the air. God made a fish to swim in the sea. You take a fish out of the sea and put him in trees, he's an unhappy fish. You take a bird out of the air and put him beneath the water, he is an unhappy bird. You, if you do not fulfill the purpose for which you were created, are never going to have fulfillment in your heart and in your life. You will be a square peg in a round hole, or vice versa. So, knowing your purpose in life is important for fulfillment.

Knowing your purpose in life is important for success. You want to be successful? Who doesn't want to be successful? Well, if you're not successful in your purpose, you're a failure. Let me give you a new definition for *failure*. It is succeeding at the wrong thing. If you succeed at the wrong thing, you are still a failure. A pencil is successful when it writes. An automobile is successful when it transports. You are successful when you do that for which you were created, for which God created you.

And, another thing: you are never going to know real guidance in your life until you know the purpose for your life. You see, purpose determines priority. Have you ever gone out to say, "Let's go out and get a bite to eat," and in the car you're talking: "What do you want? Mexican? Do you want Chinese? Do you want Italian? You want this restaurant? You want that restaurant?" At every intersection you're making a decision. Have you ever done that? Just driving around town like this. Now, if you know before you ever start out where you're going, you don't have to make a decision at every intersection.

Now, there are people whose lives are made up of a lot of small decisions, and they're constantly wrestling with what they're going to do in life, because they have never discovered the big purpose in life. They don't have guidance in life. It is so important. Proper priorities come from knowing our purpose.

Now, a lot of us think that God's purpose for our lives is to save us. Well, you need to be saved, but saved for what? You know, we're talking about, "God saved me from sin." Well, yes, thank God for that. I want to know not only what has He saved you from; what has He saved you for. Have you ever thought about it? Now, if you have a wrecked automobile, and actually when we're sinners, we're wrecked. So God hauls us

into His garage and He restores us. Does He restore us just to sit in the driveway? That's all some people think about is, "I've been saved! Hallelujah! The wreck has been repaired!" No. God saved you for a purpose. Not only what He's saves you from, but what He saves you for.

Now, we're going to look at a Psalm that tells us about God, because when you find out about God, you're going to find out so much about yourself. And, we're going to see in this Psalm who God is, and then we're going to discover, when we see who God is, who you are, because God created you, and He has a purpose for your life. So, we're going to study a little theology, and then some *me-ology*, because, you see, I have to understand God, really, to understand myself.

What you think of God has so much to do with what you think of yourself. Now, if you're an atheist and don't believe in God, or an evolutionist, then you're going to see yourself as an orphan of the apes. You'll end up making a monkey of yourself. But, if you see yourself as the creation of Almighty God, with a purpose, then you're going to want to be Christ-like. So, let's look in this Psalm, and I want to give you three or four thoughts—actually four basic thoughts—in Psalm 139. It's a glorious Psalm. We could spend a lot of time in this Psalm.

I. God Knows All About You

But, the first thought I want you to think, as we look in Psalm 139, is this: God knows all about me. Look in verse 1: "*O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me*" (Psalm 139:1). Now, God knows all about you. God has searched you.

A. God Knows Your Character

God knows your character. Friend, not only does He see you; He sees through you. You know the difference between *reputation* and *character*? *Reputation* is what others think about you; *character* is what God knows about you.

B. God Knows Your Conduct

Put it down. First of all, God knows my character—verse 1. Verses 2 and 3—God knows my conduct. Look, if you will: "*Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways*" (Psalm 139:2–3). Folks, there is not a move that you make that God doesn't see it.

I mentioned Peter Lord here earlier in the message. Peter Lord is a very creative and inventive preacher. One time he got into the attic of his church on Sunday morning, like up there where all the catwalks and so forth are. Peter Lord got up there on Sunday morning. Time to preach. He wasn't over here in the chair. Everybody was wondering, "Where's the pastor?" Well, they had the special music. Time to preach. And a voice

came, said, "Hello, folks. This is your pastor." Why, they're looking around. Where is he? Well, he had a microphone up there in the attic, up there in the ceiling, above the ceiling, and he said, "I'm going to be speaking from thus and such," and he said, "I know you can't see me, but that doesn't make a lot of difference. I can see you." He said, "Mrs. Jones, I see you going through your purse. Sally and Susan, I see you whispering." They're looking around. Where is he? How does he know where I am? They were all petrified. Everybody in the congregation wondering, "How does he see me? How does he know me?" Of course, he was up there in the ceiling looking down at all of them from above. And then, he talked to them about the fact that I'm talking to you about today: God knows; God sees our conduct.

There was a minister who had in his home on the mantel a motto that said, "Thou, God, seest me." A boy came to visit the preacher. He said, "Thou, God, seest me." He said, "Doesn't that frighten you to think that God is watching you all the time?" This pastor said, "Oh, no. That just makes me feel wonderful. It means that He loves me so much He can't take His eyes off of me"—"He loves me so much He can't take His eyes off of me."

C. God Knows Your Contemplations

Listen. God knows my character. God knows my conduct. God knows my contemplations. Notice in verse 2: "*Thou understandest my thought afar off*" (Psalm 139:2). God knows what you are thinking this very moment. God knows whether you're paying attention to the message. God knows what you're planning to do after the service. God knows whether or not you like the pastor's tie. By the way, that's my University of Florida tie. Can you see it up there real good? Football season is starting. It's orange and blue. That's why I have that tie. Now, you may just not. See, now you can't think about anything else. God knows your thoughts. God knows all of you Volunteers what you're thinking right now. Listen. God knows your contemplations. He knows what you're thinking. You may be full of lust. God says you've got adultery in your heart. You may be full of hate. God says you have murder in your heart. You may be full of praise. God knows, friend.

D. God Knows Your Conversation

God knows your character. He knows your conduct. He knows your contemplations. Listen. God knows your conversation. Look, if you will, in verse 4: "*There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether*" (Psalm 139:4). Do you know we speak in an average day enough words to fill a book? In a lifetime, a college library? And, the Bible says "*every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment*" (Matthew 12:36).

If all that we say in a single day

*With never a word left out,
Were printed each night in clear black and white,
It would make strange reading, no doubt.*

*And then just suppose, ere one's eyes he could close,
He must read the whole record through;
Then wouldn't one sigh and wouldn't one try
A whole lot less talking to do.*

*And I more than half think that many a kink
Would be smoother in life's tangled thread
If half what we say in a single day,
Were forever left unsaid.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

God hears every word. Somebody said, “Many things are opened by mistake, but none so frequently as the mouth.” Every word, every profane thought. But, thank God, He knows every prayer. He knows every tear. God knows all about me. Now, that may be a terror if you're unsaved, but what a comfort if you're saved.

II. God Is Always With Me

Now, first of all, God knows all about me. Here's the second thing I want you to learn as we're talking about why I? Not only does God know all about me; God is always with me. How foolish to try to run from God. Look in verses 5 and 6: *“Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it”* (Psalm 139:5–6). Now, he's not dismayed when he says it is *“too wonderful for me.”* He just says, “This is so great I cannot take it in.” God is always with me.

Sometimes people say, “Where is God when I really need Him?” Friend, God is not far away from you. You may be far away from God, but God is always with us. Put in your margin an ancillary verse—Jeremiah 23, verse 24: *“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD”* (Jeremiah 23:24). God is not confined to a church building. Sometimes people come to church and they say, “Well, I'll go to church—to God's house.” Friend, I'm grateful that we can worship here, but God is out there just as well as God is in here. Acts 17, verse 24: *“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands”* (Acts 17:24). You don't have to go to church to see God.

A. Death Doesn't Hide Us from God

Now, God is always with me. Death cannot hide us from God. Look, if you will, in verses

7 and 8: *“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there”* (Psalm 139:7–8). The devil is not the Lord of Hell. He’s going to Hell. He’s not there yet, but when he goes, he will not reign in Hell. God reigns in Earth, Heaven, and Hell. God is over it all. And, when you die, God is still there. If you die without Jesus, you will waken in the judgment to face the God that you spurned. If you die in the Lord, what a joy to close your eyes in this world and to open them face to face! And,

*When, by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in Heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face,
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

—CHARLES H. GABRIEL

Death cannot hide us from God. And, by the way, there won’t be any atheists in Hell. Did you know that? Not one atheist in Hell. They’ll all be believers when they get to Hell. Every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. Now, death can’t hide us from God.

B. Distance Doesn’t Hide Us from God

And, distance doesn’t hide us from God. Look, if you will, in 9 and 10: *“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:9–10). The *“wings of the morning”* are the rays of the sun. David was there on the shores of the Mediterranean. David is saying, “If I could hijack a light beam and go as far as it would take me, there God would be there.” Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, and God is saying, “If I were to hijack a light beam, I could still not escape from God.

Now, you know, I’m in the airports quite a bit. It’s amazing to see how many people are traveling. You know why they’re traveling? They’re not happy here. They think if they can get over there, they’ll be happy. And, they are filled with loneliness, and they’re thinking that somehow happiness is somewhere else. Now, let me tell you something, folks. I’m glad if you can travel, but wherever you go, you’re going to take yourself with you, and God will meet you when you get there. God will be there before you get there.

Has it ever occurred to you that God never goes anyplace? I mean, there’s no place that God can go. He is already there, and He’s never in a place where you can escape from Him. When you’re finished running from God, He’ll be there waiting for you, wherever it is. But, if you’re saved, what a blessing!

C. Darkness Doesn’t Hide Us from God

Friend, death doesn’t hide you from God. Distance doesn’t hide you from God. Darkness doesn’t hide you from God. Look in verses 11 and 12: *“If I say, Surely the*

darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee” (Psalm 139:11–12).

Now, evil people love darkness and they hate the light, but you can't hide from God in the dark. You can't pull the shades of darkness over you and hide from God. Light is not there to enable God to see. God has night vision. The darkness comes just to rest tired, human eyes. It's amazing what people will do when the lights go out. What is he saying? Listen—listen. God knows all about you. God is always with you. You cannot out-run, outwit, out-distance Almighty God. Have you got it?

III. God Has a Wonderful Purpose for Me

Now, number three: God has a wonderful purpose for me. I want you to say this: God has a wonderful purpose or plan for me. Look, if you will now, in verses 13 through 16: *“For thou hast possessed my reins:”—*what does that mean? What are my *reins*? Well, the reins of a horse are what guides it—*“thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb.”* Boy, I wish the abortionists could read this. *“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect;”—* that is, “You watch the embryo develop”—*“and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them”* (Psalm 139:13–16)—*“none of them.”*

Now, the writer of this Psalm, that I believe was David, didn't know anything about embryology. He'd never studied in the modern institutions of learning, but he knew enough to stand in awe just to see how a little baby is formed in its mother's womb, and he just had to say, concerning himself, *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”*

Now, today, as we've studied microbiology and embryology, we have learned some incredible things. There are a million million cells in your body. A microscopic cell is so small, if you look at the zero there on the printed page of your Bible, you could put 40,000 of them side by side inside that zero, that circle there on the page of your Bible. Now, these human cells are pulsating with life. Each one of the cells—listen to this—has 200 trillion molecules of atoms in one cell—200 trillion in each cell—and there are a million million cells in your body. Every minute that you live, 3 million cells die and are being replaced. Somebody said, “If you could see half of what's going on in you right now, you'd be afraid to move.” Every cell is a little micro-universe. Oh, God made it all! No wonder the Bible says, *“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”* (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1).

What I'm trying to tell you, my friend, is you're not an accident. You didn't come out

of pond scum. God made you, and God made you for a purpose. He has a wonderful plan for you, and He is an all-powerful God. He formed you in your mother's womb. You are special. What a mighty God! There is no sin He cannot forgive. There is no prayer He cannot answer. There is no soul He cannot save. There's no problem that He cannot solve. He has a wonderful plan for you.

IV. God Has Me Constantly in His Heart

Now, fourthly, and here's the fourth and final thing I want to say. You can say of God, He has me constantly in His heart. God has me constantly in His heart. Look, if you will now, in verses 17 and 18: *"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"* Now, you want to know how great God's sum is of His thoughts to you? Look in verse 18: *"If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand"* (Psalm 139:17–18)—*"If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand."*

We sing a wonderful song: "Count your many blessings, name them one by one" (Johnson Oatman, Jr.). Impossible. One of your blessings is God's thoughts toward you. Just take the vast Sahara. How many grains of sand are there? Take the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, the islands of the Pacific, and look at the grains of sand, the grains of sand in all of the fields of the earth. God's thoughts toward you are greater than all of this. God loves you. People dread God. People run from God. That is the devil's thoughts to get you to thinking negatively about God. God lives to bless you. He wants to bless you. "Well," you say, "what about all His laws?" *Every time God says, "Thou shalt not," He's just saying, "Don't hurt yourself." Every time He says, "Thou shalt," He's saying, "Help yourself to happiness."* The Bible says, *"The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"* (Psalm 84:11). If it will make you healthy, happy, wholesome, more like the Lord Jesus, God is saying, "Help yourself. I love you so much."

I was told that Bill Gaither, who is a personal friend of mine, was asked, "What are the greatest song lyrics ever written?" Now, you know Bill and Gloria are great lyricists, Brother Jim, and we sing a lot of the great Gaither songs. Somebody asked Bill, "What are the greatest lyrics, song lyrics, ever written apart from those in the Book of Psalms?" And, Bill didn't bat his eye. He said, "Beyond the shadow of a doubt, these lyrics:

*Could we with ink the oceans fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade.
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry.*

*Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

—FREDERICK M. LEHMAN

God loves you and me. God doesn't love us all; He loves us each one by one. Look what He's saying here: *"How precious...are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"*

What a mighty God we serve! All right, why I? What is my purpose? If an angel were there when God was creating Adam, an angel says, "Holy Father, what are You doing?" "I'm making a man." "Well, what are You going to do with him? What's his purpose? Why are You creating a man?" You know what God would have said? "Someone I can love and who will love Me." Do you think God created us to serve Him? Friend, He could get angels to do a better job than we do, if that's all. No, God made us in His image to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him. He knows all about me. He is forever with me. He created me for a purpose. And, He loves me so much.

Conclusion

This is the purpose that God made us for. And, we're going to be studying about that purpose. We call it "Forty Days of Purpose." Forty in the Bible is the time of testing. Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain. Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai. The spies who went out to spy out Israel were transformed by 40 days in the Promised Land. David was transformed by Goliath's 40 days of challenge to Israel. The city of Nineveh was transformed by 40 days. Jesus went into the wilderness and fought with Satan and temptation for 40 days, and came out for a public ministry.

We're calling our church to "Forty Days of Purpose." And, in the ensuing Sundays, beginning in September, we'll be talking about worship and fellowship and discipleship and ministry and evangelism. And, all of these are wrapped up in knowing and loving God. As your pastor, I'm going to ask you to get on board. I'm going to ask you, if you can, to participate in the small groups that will be formed out of Bible Fellowship classes. Now, if you don't have a Bible Fellowship class, we still have a way that you can get on board and in a small group. Secondly, we're going to ask you to get the book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, and we're going to ask you to read a chapter, a corresponding chapter, each day so that we'll all be studying it together. Next, I'm going to ask you to come and hear all seven messages that I'm going to preach. And next, I'm going to ask you to fast and pray, not fast for 40 full days, but find some time in that 40 days when you'll set aside some time for fasting and prayer. That is, you may just miss a meal and fast one meal. That would be wonderful. Just fast for a meal and give that time that you would normally go to lunch, or breakfast, or when you have your dinner, and give that time over to prayer. Or, you may take a day to fast. Or, you may fast for a longer period

of time. But, what I want us to do as a church is to all of us get on the same page and to find out why we exist, what we're here for. And, you know, when we find it out as individuals, *ipso facto*, we'll know it as a church, won't we? Forty Days of Purpose.

Now, it all begins with knowing Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. It was Jesus who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). When He said, "I am the way," He implied that we're lost and we can't find our way apart from Him. When He said, "I am the truth," He implied that we're in error and we'll never know truth without Jesus. And, when He said, "I am the life," He implied that we're dead in trespasses and sins. He's the way by which we come to God. He's the truth by which we know God. He's the life by which God lives in us and we live in Him.

Why Do I Exist?

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: August 24, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 139

“O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.”

PSALMS 139:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. God Knows All About Me
 - A. God Knows My Character
 - B. God Knows My Conduct
 - C. God Knows My Contemplations
 - D. God Knows My Conversation
- II. God Is Always With Me
 - A. Death Doesn't Hide Us from God
 - B. Distance Doesn't Hide Us from God
 - C. Darkness Doesn't Hide Us from God
- III. God Has a Wonderful Purpose for Me
- IV. God Has Me Constantly in His Heart

Conclusion

Introduction

Find in God's Word Psalm 139. And, as you're finding the Psalm, I want to ask you this question: Do you have a purpose in life? Why do you exist? Are you simply drawing your breath and drawing your salary, going from day to day, or can you clearly articulate God's purpose for you? Or, to put it distinctly, why I? Why do we exist?

Now, we as a church are going into a program called "Forty Days of Purpose." In the Bible, God has used 40 days to transform people. Noah's life was transformed by 40 days of rain. Moses' life was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai. The spies who went into the land of Canaan to spy out the land were transformed by those 40 days there in the land. The city of Nineveh was transformed by 40 days of the preaching of Jonah. Jesus was empowered for ministry as He went into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days. And, I'm praying that our life as individuals and the corporate life of this church will be radically transformed by these 40 days.

Now, folks, it's very important that you understand the purpose of life, because if you don't have a purpose in life, you're drifting through life, and you're never going to hit the

mark if you don't know what it is. Do you know the Bible word for *sin* literally means, "to miss the mark"? An archer aims at the target, and the bow goes awry, and the arrow is skewed, and he misses the mark. And, the Bible calls missing the mark *sin*, and it calls sin "missing the mark." Now, if you don't know your function, you're going to be a failure. Now, you may be a successful businessman, but if you don't know why God created you, you're still a failure. Let me give you a definition of *failure*. Are you ready for it? *Failure* is succeeding at the wrong thing. That's *failure*: succeeding at the wrong thing.

Do you know God's purpose for your life? Now, if you know God's purpose for your life, then you're a success. What is the purpose of a fountain pen? The purpose of a fountain pen is to write. If it doesn't write, no matter what else it does, it's really a failure. The purpose of an automobile is transportation. If it doesn't transport, no matter what else it may do, it is a failure. Now, what is God's purpose for your life? It is so important—so important—that you understand God's purpose for your life, because you will never experience fulfillment without knowing God's true purpose: you'll just be a meaningless generality wandering through life.

What did God make a bird to do? To fly in the air. What did God make a fish to do? To swim in the sea. Now, if you take a bird out of the air and put him under the water, he's an unhappy bird. If you take a fish out of the sea and put him in a tree, he's not a very happy fish, because that's not what God formed him to do, what God made him to do. And, until you find your purpose, you're going to be like a bird under water, or a fish in a tree, like a square peg in a round hole; you're going to be a misfit. You see, you will never know true fulfillment, and again, you'll not know true success. Again, I come back. The purpose of a pen is to write.

Now, have you ever had a pen that wouldn't write? You may have a very expensive pen. Somebody gave me a very expensive pen. I mean, it is lovely. It's a work of art. It's handcrafted. One thing wrong with it: it won't write. I'm telling you that a 20-cent Bic is better than a 100-dollar pen that won't write, so far as fulfilling its purpose—is that not correct? Now, you may be a high-class individual here today; you may not be a Bic like the rest of us. But, I'm telling you this: that you are not successful, and you will not know success, until you find your purpose. And, therefore, you won't have guidance. Guidance and purpose are rooted together, everybody wanting to know the will of God.

Well, how are you going to know the will of God if you don't know your purpose to begin with? Have you ever started out to a restaurant, and everybody gets in the car? You're going out to eat, but you haven't decided what you're going to eat, or where you're going. Somebody says, "You want Mexican?" "No, we had that last night." "Do you want to go Chinese?" "Well, no." "You want to go Italian?" And, every intersection you turn the car this way, then this way, then that way, and you're just going around and around like. Have you ever been there? Lift your hand. You know what I'm talking

about. Sure, we all have. Now, listen. If, when you get in the car you say, “We are going to...”—and I’m not going to give any advertisement here, but you’re going to—then you don’t have to make a decision at every intersection. Now, the reason that so many people are going through life continually making all of these petty decisions is they have never understood the purpose in life, and therefore they don’t have guidance. Your priorities are straightened out when you understand your purpose.

Now, many Christians, and especially in our Baptist churches, love to talk about being saved—and I do too. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). We believe in getting people saved here at Bellevue Baptist Church. I mean, that’s an old-fashioned word, but it’s a good word. “*Thou shalt call his name JESUS.*”—the angel said—“*for he shall*”—what?—“*save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21). But, friend, most of us are all wrapped up in what we are saved from: saved from sin; saved from Hell. Have you ever thought about what God saved you for? You see, God saved you so He could get you into what He wants you to do. If you have a wrecked automobile, you bring it into the people to straighten out the fenders, and to realign the automobile, and so forth. They mend the wreck. They fix the wreck. Well, what do they fix it for? To sit in the garage or the driveway? No. Why did God repair us? Why did God bring us into redemption’s shop and repair us? So that He could use us so that we might fulfill the purpose for which we were created to begin with.

Now, we’re going to look at a Psalm, Psalm 139, which is a great Psalm, because in Psalm 139 we learn a lot of things about God, and we learn a lot of things about us. As a matter of fact, you will not understand God’s purpose for your life till you understand some things about God, because the two are inextricably interwoven. So, we’re going to look at a little theology and a little *me-ology*, okay? What is the purpose for my life in the light of what God has done and who God is?

Four factors I want to tell you about God here today, and I want you to personalize these and make them personal. So, you’ll notice the way I’ve done the headings: they include the word *me*, and that me is you, all right?

I. God Knows All About Me

The first thing I want you to jot down here in Psalm 139 is that God knows all about me—God knows all about me.

A. God Knows My Character

For example, God knows my character. Look in Psalm 139, verse 1: “*O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me*” (Psalm 139:1). Now, not only does God see us today; God sees through us. God has searched us. God knows us. God knows all about you.

God knows your heart. There's nothing that's hidden to God. He knows all about you. He knows all about me. Now, as human beings, we know one another's reputation, but God knows our character. The difference between reputation and character: reputation is what others think about you; character is what God knows you. Now, God knows my character. God knows your character right now. He sees your heart. He knows your heart.

B. God Knows My Conduct

But, not only does God know your character; God knows your conduct. Look in the next two verses, 2 and 3: *"Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising,"*—God saw you sit down in church this morning—*"thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways"* (Psalm 139:2–3). God will see you walk out of church. He knows every step you'll take. God will keep His eye on you today until you lie down and pull the covers up around your neck. God knows your conduct. There is not a move that God does not see.

I have a preacher friend named Peter Lord. He's spoken here from our pulpit. Peter Lord on an occasion in his Park Avenue Church down there in Titusville, Florida got up in the ceiling in the attic of the church, looking down through a hole in the ceiling. He had a microphone up there with him. And, the people came in. It was time to preach. The music had finished, and there was no pastor sitting there in the chair. They wondered, "Where is the pastor. Is he sick? Has he forgotten to come? Is he late?" But, he said with a microphone, "Hello, brothers and sisters." They looked around. They didn't see him. He said, "I want us to get our Bibles and turn..." They said, "Where is he? We can't see him." He begins to preach. "Oh," he said, "I know you can't see me, but never mind: I see you." He said, "Mrs. Jones, I see you going through your purse right now." And then, he began to talk about a couple of kids who were whispering. He said, "I see you, Susan. I see you, Jeanine, whispering like this in church." Well, everybody was afraid to move. Where is he? Because from his vantage point he could see them, but they could not see him.

Now, did you know today that God sees you sitting in church? Kids, He sees everything you do. Sir, He sees what you're reading. He sees. God knows.

C. God Knows My Contemplations

Listen. He knows my character. And, He knows my conduct. And, He knows also my contemplations. Look, if you will now, in verse 2: *"Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising,"*—now, watch this—*"thou understandest my thought afar off"* (Psalm 139:2). Now, Peter Lord could not see what the people were thinking, but God knows your thoughts right now. God knows your very thoughts. Are you thinking about Him right now? Are you concentrating on the service, your mind on what you're going to

have for lunch, or what you're going to do this afternoon, or what you think of the pastor's wonderful necktie, which happens to be orange and blue, which happens to be the colors of the University of Florida. That's for free for you Volunteer fans. God knows what you're thinking. God knows right now. He knows every thought in your mind. He knows that you're thinking. That was a silly thing for the pastor to do just then. There's nothing that you think that He does not know. He knows my character. He knows my conduct. He knows my contemplations.

D. God Knows My Conversation

He also knows my conversation. Look, if you will, in verse 4: *"There is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether"* (Psalm 139:4). You know, if we realize that, we might be more careful with our speech, wouldn't we? Our criticism? Our carping? Sometimes our careless, flippant thought. The Bible says, *"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"* (Matthew 12:36). But, He also knows when we praise Him. He also knows every good thing, every wholesome word that comes out of our mouths. You know, we speak enough in one day to fill up a complete book if it were bound, and in a lifetime enough to fill a college library.

*If all that we say in a single day
With never a word left out,
Were printed each night in clear black and white,
It would make strange reading, no doubt.
And then just suppose, ere one's eyes he could close,
He must read the whole record through;
Then wouldn't one sigh and wouldn't one try
A whole lot less talking to do.
And I more than half think that many a kink
Would be smoother in life's tangled thread
If half what we say in a single day,
Were forever left unsaid.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

I believe that. We need to be careful with our language. But, the good thought is that there is a God who hears every word of praise, who hears every word of prayer, who hears every word of witness. And so, the first thing I want you to say about God is He knows all about me. He knows me. You can fool the pastor. You can fool your wife. Sometimes you can deceive yourself. But, God knows my conduct. God knows my contemplations. God knows my conversations. God knows all about me.

II. God Is Always With Me

Second thing: Not only does God know all about me, but here's a wonderful thought: God is always with me—always with me. Sometimes people say, "Where is God when I need Him so much?" Right there with you. Now, you may feel far away from Him, but the Bible says, "*The LORD is nigh unto all that call upon him*" (Psalm 145:18). Look, if you will, in verses 5 and 6: "*Thou hast beset me behind and before,*"—that is, God is following you, and God is leading you—"*and laid thine hand upon me.*" God is over you. "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it*" (Psalm 139:5–6). Now, when he says, "*too wonderful for me,*" he doesn't mean that it's dreadful. He just means it's glorious. "Lord, You are always with me."

You know, God is everywhere. Has it ever occurred to you that God never has to go anywhere? He's always there. No matter where you are, God is there. Jeremiah 23, verse 24: "*Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD*" (Jeremiah 23:24). Sometimes people think, "Well, God is here at church, but He's not out yonder." The Bible says, "God doesn't dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48; Acts 17:24). God is everywhere. There's nowhere that you can escape God.

A. Death Doesn't Hide Us from God

Look, if you will, here in Psalm 139, verses 7 and 8: "*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*" It's foolish to try to run away from God. Why? "*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there*" (Psalm 139:7–8). Now, what he is saying is that death can't hide us from God. You go to Heaven: there He is. You die and go to Hell: there He is. Did you know that God is in Hell? God is in Heaven. There is no place where God is not. Don't get the idea that the devil is the lord of Hell. He's not the lord of Hell. He's not. God is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and Hell beneath. He is God. The devil doesn't reign in Hell. God reigns in Hell. I'll tell you something else. When the people go to Hell who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, those who refuse Him will bow the knee to Him then in hell. "*As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God*" (Romans 14:11). So then, every one of us should give an account of himself unto God.

Did you there are no atheists in Hell? There are atheists here. Well, there not any really true atheists here. They say they're atheists, but in their heart they know better. I mean, in their true, deepest being they know better. They may say there is no God, but they know better. But, in Hell they will confess that there is God. They won't be in Hell five minutes before they believe in God. You can't escape from God. "If I make my bed in hell, thou art there."

Friend, if you're trying to run from God—and, some in this auditorium are running

from God; you say, “Well, I don’t want God. I’m running away from God; I’m running away from God; I’m running away from God”—when you get there, God will say, “Hello. Hello.” When you run from God, when you finish running, God will be there at the end of the race. There is no way that you can escape from Him. But, if you’re saved, what a blessing that is.

*When, by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in Heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face,
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

—CHARLES H. GABRIEL

B. Distance Doesn’t Hide Us from God

What he’s saying is death doesn’t hide us from God. And, distance doesn’t hide us from God. Psalm 139, verses 9 through 10: *“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me”* (Psalm 139:9–10). Now, David lived on the shores of the Mediterranean. *“The wings of the morning”* are the rays of the sun that come up. And, David said, “You know, if I could hijack a light beam and go across this Mediterranean Sea, God would be there with me. I’m traveling at 186,000 miles per second.” Of course, David didn’t know the speed of light, but he thought of how the light just goes out across the shimmering sea.

Friend, listen. I am in the airports often. I’m amazed at where people are going, how many people are traveling. Everybody’s going. Do you know why they’re going from here to there? They’re not happy here, so they think if they can get over there they’ll be happy. They’re not content here. They think if they can be over there somehow they’ll be content. Let me tell you something. Everywhere you go, you take yourself, and when you get there, God is already there.

C. Darkness Doesn’t Hide Us from God

What’s he saying? Death doesn’t hide us from God. Distance doesn’t hide us from God. And, darkness doesn’t hide us from God. Look in verses 11 and 12: *“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee”* (Psalm 139:11–12).

Now, we’re children of light, but the unsaved are children of darkness. We sometimes laugh at a child afraid of the dark. I think more ridiculous is a man afraid of the light. Jesus said people hate the light and they won’t come to the light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). You know, character is what you are in the dark. But, God has night vision. God doesn’t have to have light to see us. Why do we have night? To

rest the tired eyes of human beings. God sees in the daytime and the nighttime, and God sees in the night as if it were day.

What's he saying? Listen. He is saying, "God, You know all about me. God, You're always with me. Death, distance, darkness: they can't separate me from You." Now, is that a comforting thought to you or not? Well, if you're not saved, it's not a comforting thought. The presence of God makes you edgy. If you're saved, it's a very comforting thought.

A minister had on the mantel of his house there over the fireplace these words: "Thou, God, seest me." A little boy came in there and said, "Pastor, doesn't that make you nervous: "Thou, God, seest me"? He said, "No, son, that makes me feel so good. It means He loves me so much He can't take His eyes off of me."

III. God Has a Wonderful Purpose for Me

Now, listen. God knows all about me. God is always with me. Here's the third thing I want you to see. God has a wonderful purpose for me—God has a wonderful purpose for me. Say that to yourself. Look, if you will, in 13 through 16: "*For thou hast possessed my reins:*"—your reins, that's what you steer a horse with, the guiding part of your life—"*thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance...*"—he's talking about when he was an embryo in his mother's womb—"*Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*" (Psalm 139:13–16).

Now, he didn't know about DNA. He didn't know about stem cells. But, he could say, "God, You had a book on me. You designed me. You had a purpose for me. I'm not an accident. I'm not a product of evolution. I didn't come out of some primordial pond scum. *"I am fearfully and wonderfully made."* Now, when God made Adam, formed Adam out of the dust of the ground, suppose an angel had been there and said, "Lord, what are You doing?" "I'm making a man." "Oh, a man? Well, why? What is his purpose?"

Why I? Why did God make us so fearfully and wonderfully? What is the purpose? So many people say, "Well, God made us to serve Him." Let me tell you something. If God made us to serve Him, He didn't do a good job. I mean, if He just wanted people to serve Him, or things to serve Him, He could get angels. Angels would do a much better job than human beings. But, He made us in His image after His likeness. He did not make us merely to serve Him, though serve Him we should. God is love, and God wanted someone like Himself that He could love. Love is not love until it is shared, in the truest sense of the word. And so, God set His love, His affection, upon us. And, God

has a purpose for Adrian, and God has a purpose for you. God wants us to love Him, and He wants to love us. And so, this is the reason that we are so fearfully and wonderfully made—and, we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

David didn't know anything about embryology. David didn't know anything about microbiology when he wrote this. But, I did a little reading about the way we are fearfully and wonderfully made. There are approximately a million million cells in your body. And, a cell is so small that if you look down at the zero on the printed page of your Bible, you could put 40,000 cells side by side inside that circle. A cell is mighty small, but inside that cell—are you listening to this?—in one cell, there are 200 trillion atoms in one of those cells. And, 40,000 of those could fit inside that zero in your Bible—200 trillion atoms. And, inside that atom are entities whirling around at incredible speed. Three million cells die every minute in our bodies and are replaced. Somebody said, “If we could see what's going on inside of us at any moment—just half of what's going on inside of us—we'd be afraid to move.” Now, as we're able to look into the incredible mechanism that God created, oh, that little baby in nine months, that's a miracle, friend—just a miracle. David said, “Lord, I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

God had a purpose when He made you. Ethel Waters said, “God don't make no junk.” God has a purpose for you. These “Forty Days of Purpose” are to help you to discover your purpose in life, to find meaning, to find fulfillment, to find success, to find satisfaction, and you find your purpose why God created you. And, He is such a mighty God. David is just taken aback. “Oh,” he said, “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14). When he talked about God's omnipresence, he said, “*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me*” (Psalm 139:6). That's the reason I love for us to sing, “What a Mighty God We Serve.” There's no sin God cannot forgive. There is no problem that God cannot solve. There is no soul that God cannot save. Friend, God is mighty. There is no prayer that God cannot answer. The only thing that lies outside answered prayer is that which lies outside the will of God.

IV. God Has Me Constantly in His Heart

Now, here's the fourth and final thing after we learn these other things. God knows all about me. God's always with me. God has a plan and a purpose for me, a wonderful purpose for me. Here's the fourth and the final thing this Psalm teaches. God has me constantly in His heart. Look in Psalm 139 now, verses 17 and 18: “*How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee*” (Psalm 139:17–18).

Now, he says, “Lord, You love me. You have me on Your heart. You are constantly with me. You are constantly thinking about me.” Now, he doesn't say God's thinking

about everybody. He is saying, “God, I am special to You. Your thoughts to me are more than all the grains of sand on all the earth.” I’ve been to the Sahara Desert. I’ve seen it. More than each grain of sand in the Sahara. I’ve seen the beaches of Florida. Your thoughts are more than every grain of sand on all the seashore. Think of how much God loves you. Most of us spend our lives running from God, afraid of God. That’s the devil’s lie.

I saw a man wearing a tee shirt one time. On the front of it, it said, “God will get you for that.” I don’t know what he had in mind. “God will get you for that.” Everybody has the idea that there’s a God up in Heaven that’s some sort of a cruel, wrathful God, some sort of a vengeful God, making rules to make us squirm like a worm in hot ashes, trying to keep them; and if we don’t keep them, He’s going to fling us into Hell. That’s not the God of the Bible. There is a Hell for Christ rejecters, but a brokenhearted God will watch you drop into Hell if you refuse the only remedy. God loves you, and God’s laws are for your welfare. *Every time God says, “Thou shalt not,” He’s just saying, “Don’t hurt yourself.” Every time God says, “Thou shalt,” He’s saying, “Help yourself to happiness. I love you.”* How precious are His thoughts toward me!

We sing,

*Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

—JOHNSON OATMAN, JR.

You couldn’t begin to count them anymore than you could count the grains of sand in the Sahara. More than the sand of the sea are His thoughts toward you. Does that bless you to know that? You see, *“The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”* (Psalm 84:11). God made you to love you. He wants to save you. He wants to enfold you. He wants to give you a purpose for living, a hope in dying. He wants to give you *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8). He wants to give you peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). He wants you to say, “I matter,” and you will never, never, never, no, never ever have any meaning to life until you understand why God made you. You will be a round peg in a square hole. It is in Him that we *“live, and move, and have our being”* (Acts 17:28). He knows all about you.

Friend, He’s always with you. He created you for a purpose. And, He loves you very much. That’s why Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). When He said, “I am the way,” He meant we’re lost without Him. He’s the only way to the Father. “I’m the truth”: we’re in error without Him. He’s the only way to understand it all. And, “I am the life”: we’re dead without Him; you have existence, but you don’t have life. Jesus says to people whose hearts are already beating, “I’ve come that you might have a life.” John 10:10: “I’ve come that you might

have life, and have it more abundantly.”

Conclusion

Look up here and let me tell you something. *If I had a thousand lives to live, I would give every one of them to Jesus Christ.* And, if I could my heart to Jesus Christ on your behalf, I would, but I can't. I've preached as best I know. In a moment I'm going to give a gospel invitation for you to do what you will be glad that you did when you stand in God's presence. I'm going to ask you to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, and to acknowledge Him by coming forward. I'm going to ask you in a moment to leave your seat and come forward. Your coming forward will be your way of saying openly and publicly and unashamedly, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe He paid my sin debt with His blood on the cross. And, today, by faith, I'm receiving Him as my Lord and Savior, and I'm indicating it by my coming forward."

Let Praise Change Your Life

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: June 4, 2003

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 147

“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

PSALMS 147:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. Praise Reverences Our God
- II. Praise Refreshes Our Spirit
- III. Praise Releases Our Faith
- IV. Praise Reflects Our Thankfulness
- V. Praise Resists Our Enemies
- VI. Praise Restores Our Peace
- VII. Praise Remembers Our Dependence

Conclusion

Introduction

Find the Book of Psalms, the middle Book of the Bible, and find Psalm 147. Tonight I want to talk to you about praise, and we've just heard a song that ought to engender praise. If there's anything in your heart that loves Jesus, I know that you were praising Him during that song.

The title of our study tonight, “Let Praise Change Your Life.” We used to sing a chorus, “It's Amazing What Praising Can Do,” and that is absolutely true. Something you may not know, ladies and gentlemen, there is more emphasis, listen, on praise than there is prayer in the Bible.

Now you say, “Praise is Prayer.” No, prayer in its truest sense is asking of God. Prayer goes into God's presence to carry something away. Praise goes into God's presence just to remain there forever. Now both are wonderful, but there is a great emphasis in the Bible, believe it or not, on praise than there is in prayer. Now praise is very powerful, very practical, so let me give you some reasons from Psalm 147, why you ought to praise because praise can change your life.

I. Praise Reverences Our God

Reason number one: Praise reverences our God. Look in verse 1, “Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

That means it is beautiful. Did you know that when God created this universe, this entire universe, everything living and non-living—animals and insects, rocks and trees, stellar bodies—all of it exists as a hymn of praise. For example, you’re in Psalm 147. Go back to Psalm 145 and look in verse 10: “All thy works shall praise Thee O Lord, and Thy saints shall bless Thee.”

When the Bible says, “all Thy works,” it just means everything that God has created has been created to render to Him praise. Go to Psalm 148 and look in the first five verses: “Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts—the word “hosts” refers to the stars—Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.”

Everything, every blade of grass says “Praise the Lord!” Every branch on every tree, and ever leaf on every branch says “Praise the Lord!” Every bird that flies in the sky says “Praise the Lord!” All of the vast stellar resources, the angels—“Praise the Lord!” The highest occupation of angels is to praise the Lord.

Revelation 4, verse 8, “And the four beasts have each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within, and they rest not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, is, and is to come.” Praise reverences God.

That’s the reason profanity is such a terrible sin. Do you use profanity? Don’t answer out loud, answer in your heart. Profanity degrades God. Profanity dishonors God. You take the Name of the thrice holy God of Israel, the Name that the angels around the throne are saying, “holy, holy, holy,” take that Name upon your lips, sometimes mix it in the slime of the sewer, and then utter it in exasperation or hate towards somebody else, you have dishonored the Name of God and you’ve committed one of the most foolish things you could ever do. Profanity is especially wicked and especially foolish. Now no one should steal, but if you steal, you get what you stole. No one should commit adultery, but if you commit adultery, you’ve satisfied your carnal lust. Nobody should kill, but if you killed another, you’ve brought to yourself what you call revenge. All of those things are bad, and no one should steal or commit adultery or murder, but what do you get when you curse? Nothing but judgment.

It’s like a fish biting a hook with no bait on it. It is wicked, it is senseless, it is foolish, never take God’s Name in vain. You say, “Well, Pastor, you’ve been so serious—I don’t mean anything by it.” The fact that you could take that name by it and not mean anything about it condemns you. That God is of no importance to you, that God is of no

more importance to you, that you could take His name in vain, and sometimes if you rebuke a man for taking God's Name in vain, they ask, "What did I say?" "What did I say?" He's not even aware that He's taken God's Name in vain.

Praise reverences God. The Bible says it is comely to praise the Lord. Did you know that worship is related to the Word "worthy" or "worth-ship?" We get our word, "worship" from worth-ship. That God is worth reverencing.

II. Praise Refreshes Our Spirit

Second thing praise will do. Not only does praise reverence our God, but praise refreshes our spirit. Look if you will now in verse 2 and 3, "The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

Do you have a broken heart? Have you felt like an outsider? Cast off? Forgotten? Discouraged? Listen—make your heart an instrument of praise and you will find your spirit beginning to sing and to soar when you praise the Lord. An interesting thing, next time you go into a bookstore, even a good Christian bookstore, ours is a great bookstore, but go into the nominal Christian bookstore, or a secular bookstore and go and look at all of the books, especially in the religion section, that deal with the idea of psychosis, neurosis, depression, discouragement—all of these books, the bestsellers, they deal with helping people to somehow get out of the dumps, get out of some sort of a spiritual funk that they are in. The subject of mental health seems to be as a big, or bigger, among Christians than the unsaved people.

Listen to me, brothers and sisters, not everybody who has a mental problem has a mental problem because they fail to praise God, but if God's people would learn how to praise to Him, a lot of psychiatrists, a lot of psychologists, and a lot of counselors would have to close up shop. Because people have not learned how to refresh their spirit by praise. Now you know, a person many times, who is out of whack emotionally and spiritually is that way because of an overflow preoccupation with ego, or self. People are self-centered. Now you think about what happens when a person gets self-occupied. If I am the center of my little old universe, if I sit upon the throne of my life, if I am occupied with my self, if I am ego-centric, then I'm my own little god. And then because I am ego-centered, what do I have to do? I have to defend my little kingdom. And so when I defend my little kingdom, I get defensive and then I get hostile because I'm wonderful what you're trying to do to me, with me, or about me. And then I may get aggressive. And a lot of people just walk around like time bombs, ready to blow up because they're self-centered. Then they become defensive. And then they become hostile. And then they become aggressive.

Out in California, in some other parts of the country, they have something called

road rage. Do you know what all of that is about? You have invaded my space, you have irritated me. You have slowed me down. You have not been respectful to me. Me. Me. I. I. I. Do you know what praise does? Praise takes the emphasis upon sinful self and removes it and puts it upon the Holy, lovely God. And when you take that emphasis and begin to put that emphasis not on your own center, but upon God, your life is no more destructive.

Let me tell you what Jesus said in Luke chapter 9, verse 24: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

People who are self-centered have miserable lives. Now, listen, you cannot give yourself to praise and still be occupied with self. If you’re having problems with self-centeredness, begin to praise God. Change the focus of your life. Take away that center of occupation as your bankrupt self, and just put your mind on God and praise God. And friend, it’s going to change you. I tell you something that is absolutely true, you cannot praise and complain at the same time. You just can’t do it. You cannot praise and have bitterness at the same time because one will replace the other. Let me give you a Scripture that deals with this. In Isaiah 61, and verse 3, the Bible says, “to appoint them that mourn in Zion...” that is people who are brokenhearted, “to give unto them—listen—beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”

When you begin to glorify God, when you begin to praise God, what happens is this, friend, you make an exchange. You take and put on the garment of praise. And as Brother Whitmire reminds us of so many times on Sunday morning, we cast off that garment of heaviness.

III. Praise Releases Our Faith

What will praise do? It reverences our God. What does praise God? It refreshes our spirit. If you’ve got a spirit of heaviness, self-centeredness, hostility, defensiveness, or even paranoia, learn to praise God. Here’s a third thing praise will do: praise releases our faith.

Look if you will in verses 4 through 6: “He telleth the number of the stars...” What that means is not He announces how many there are. A teller in the bank is somebody who deals with figures. He counts. That is God numbers the stars, “He telleth the number of the stars.”

“He calleth them all by their names.” How many stars are there? Well, I was reading Astronomers, tell us, they estimate one hundred billion stars in our galaxy, and our galaxy is one of a hundred billion estimated galaxies, and then they tell us what we

know about all of that is about one billionth of theoretical space. Who knows how many stars? But the Bible says God not only knows their number, He knows all of their names. Did you know God has a name for every star? The billions and gazillions of stars that are out there—every one of them by name. That impresses me, I can't even remember that names of all of my grandchildren sometimes. And God just calls all of those stars by name. Now what the Psalmist is saying, "Think of how mighty this God is."

Look in verse 5: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. Now when you praise God, what you're doing is focusing on God's greatness, God's goodness, God's glory, God's understanding and when you do that, when you see how great God is, and begin to praise Him for His greatness, then your problems shrink into perspective. Now you take the worst thing you can think of—the greatest problem you have and double it and double it again and double it one more time, and let me ask you, is that big toward God? Not the One whose understanding is infinite. Not the One who has numbered all of those starts. Not the One, friend, Who has given every one of them a name. And this is the same God that has numbered the hairs of your head and attends the funeral of every sparrow.

Joyce and I were walking last week, down by the side of the road was a dead sparrow. I said, "He had a funeral. God was there." Jesus said, "Not a sparrow falls without your Father's notice." Wouldn't you begin to see how great God is. What that is going to do is to increase your faith. Do you know what praise is? Praise is worry turned inside out. That's what praise is. Praise is saying, "God, You are the mighty God and no matter what, I'm going to trust You." The disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

And so our Lord said, "All right, when you pray, pray this way—this manner." Now He didn't say "pray this prayer." It's alright if you want to pray the prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. And so on. That's fine. If that's what you feel in your heart. But that's not why Jesus gave that prayer. He didn't "pray this prayer." He said "in this manner, pray ye." Notice how the prayer begins, "Our Father which art in heaven hallowed be Thy Name." It begins with praise. How does it end? It ends with praise: For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever." It would be good to put that kind of parenthesis on every prayer, would it not?

Look, have you ever noticed how this begins? It begins talking to God as a Father, our Father which art in heaven. You know how it ends? It ends talking about God as a King—For Thine is the Kingdom. Our Father is the King. Our Father is the King. You see, I have a Father Who loves me and I have a King Who can answer me. My Father told me one time, before I went away to college, "Son, I'd like to pay your way to college. I don't have the money." I said, "That's all right. God has called me to preach

and God's going to supply," and He has. My heavenly Father would never have to say, "Adrian, I want to do something for you, but I can't afford it." You see, in God, a Father and a King, we have sympathy and sovereignty. A Father Who can hear us and a King Who can answer us.

And when you praise, what you're doing is bringing all of that into focus. You are, in praise, you are increasing your faith because you're seeing, as we see again, in verse 5, "Great is our God and of great power: his understanding is infinite." Now notice what happens, "The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground." Friend, God is in charge of it all. Sin can't win. Faith can't fail. As we preached here not so long ago.

IV. Praise Reflects Our Thankfulness

Now number 4, praise reflects our thankfulness. Now we ought to be thankful. If you are thankful, then you praise the Lord. Look at it, verses 7 through 9 as we follow: "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast —that means the animal—his food, and to the young ravens which cry."

Now, praise reflects thankfulness. You know, it's easier to complain sometimes than to give thanks. As someone has said, "We are grumbly hateful when we ought to be humbly grateful." Have you ever complained about some things that maybe, when you think about it, you'd be ashamed if you really thought about it. Have you ever complained about a cloudy day? Have you ever complained about rain when you wanted to have a picnic? Or maybe something that brought a little flash flood here or there. And you don't like the weather. Notice, look at it: "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth:"

Well you'd better be thankful, because the rain does what? It makes the grass to grow. And what does that do? It gives the beast his food. And what do you do? You eat the grass and eat the beast. I mean, without the vegetation and in the food chain, we'd be a mess. And so God brings the clouds and God brings the rain. You know, we need to focus on just how rich we are. Do you know, I'd much rather appreciate the things that I do have than to have things I don't appreciate.

Praise thanks God. If you have a thankful spirit, be thankful for thankful spirits. People who don't praise God are thankless people, and I feel sorry for them. If you can't thank God for what you have received, you ought to thank Him for what you've not received. Be thankful. Thankfulness and thoughtfulness come out of the same heart. Hear this writer of the psalm as he says, "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing

praise upon the harp unto our God.”

If you sit here in a church service. Now everybody knows that I’m not a great singer. Well, I am a great singer. God loves to hear me sing. I don’t care what you think. If you sit here in a church service and we have a song service, and you don’t join in, you ought to be ashamed of yourself that you cannot do what the Bible says, “Sing unto the Lord.” We’re not singing for one another. This is because God has been so great to us. Sing praise upon the harp unto our God. All of these things that God has done for us. We all have so much to be grateful for.

I had a young couple call upon me. He was handsome and strong. She was beautiful. They were in their twenties. They had one of the most beautiful babies I had ever seen. That man came to my office and began to cry. And I said, “What’s wrong?” He said, “Nothing is working for us. I don’t have a job. We don’t have any money. Everything is going against us. We don’t have anything.” I said, “You don’t have anything?” I said, “Are you healthy?” “Oh yes, I’m healthy.” I said, “Friend, there are billionaires who would give their last penny in exchange for your health.” It’s true. There are billionaires who would give their last penny in exchange for your health. I said, “Do you love one another?” “Oh, we love one another.” I said, “There are plenty of people who’d give up a fine home if they could just have love restored to their marriage.” I said, “Are you Americans?” “Oh yes, we’re Americans!” I said, “You live in this country?” “Yes!” I said, “All over the world, there are people walking away from houses and lands and leaving money in the bank just to get to these shores. Just to be an American. People who have said, ‘I’ll leave it all if I can just come to America.’” I said, “You’re already here. That little baby.” I said, “Do you love it?” “Oh, do we love our baby!” I said, “I’ll give you fifty bucks for her” or something. I said, “How much would you sell that child for? A hundred thousand dollars? Five hundred thousand dollars? A Million dollars?” “She’s not for sale.” “Well you’ve got a million dollar baby there and you come in here and tell me that you don’t have anything.”

Now folks, isn’t it better to appreciate the things that you do have then to fail to be satisfied because there’s some things you don’t have. Now praise reflects our thankfulness.

V. Praise Resists Our Enemies

Number five—if you’re keeping score, we’re almost finished—number five, praise resists our enemies. Do you have some enemies? You may not have thought about it, but praise is one of the best ways to resist the devil. Now notice in this Psalm here, verses 10 and 11. All this psalm is about praise now: “He delighteth not in the strength of the horse—speaking of God—he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.” That’s especially true if you’ve seen Mark Dougherty’s legs. “He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.

The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.”

Now what he’s talking about here is the legs of a man, he’s talking about a marching army. Horses, he’s talking about horses prepared for battle. And he is saying, “That’s not what pleases God, that you have big armaments and strong soldiers.” Praise is what gives God delight. “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.”

There was a King in the Bible, his name was Jehoshaphat. He had an army coming against him. He didn’t know what to do. He went to the Lord and here’s what the Lord said. “I’ll tell you what to do. When you go against the enemy that’s coming against you, begin to praise the Lord. Praise Me, and I’ll give you the victory.” Let me read it to you, 2 Chronicles. 2 Chronicles, chapter 20. I’m going to just read two verses: “And they rose early in the morning—talking about the people of God—and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.”

Can you imagine in Iraq a battalion of American soldiers singing “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “Glory to our God!” “Holy, holy, holy.” That’s what they’re doing. Praise the Lord. Now notice in verse 22, “And when they began to sing and praise.” Not before.

“And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.”

It was not until they began to praise that God worked. Have you got some enemies coming against you? Has the devil marshaled an army against you? These people of the Moabites and the Ammonites and the people of mount Seir were enemies of God, they were satanically inspired. They were coming against Judah. Out of Judah was going to come the Messiah—it’s the Messianic line. What this was an attack of hell against the plans of God. And Jehoshaphat knew his God, and he knew the plans of God. It was a spiritual conflict. And when they began to praise, the enemy was decimated. Did you know that when we praise, God is especially present. Now God is omnipresent. “Omni” do you know what that means? All-present. A wise man once said of God, “God is a circle,” listen to this. This is great. It’s not original of me. The only thing of me is original sin, I believe. Well that started with Adam. “God is a circle Whose Center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere.” Isn’t that beautiful?

See, God is everywhere. God is a circle whose center is everywhere, Whose circumference is nowhere. There’s no place where God is not, but God, listen folks, God

is dynamically present when we praise Him. Now He's everywhere, but there's a sense of which He is dynamically present when we praise Him. That's what the Scripture means when it says in Psalm 22, verse 3, "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praise of Israel." Praise is God's address. Praise is God's address. That's where God lives. Now, wherever God is present in dynamic power, I'll tell you who doesn't want to be there—Satan. Satan is allergic to massive praise. Satan, when he gets around a place where people are not just singing songs, but when they are praising the Lord. I mean, truly praise the Lord. Satan wants to saturate that place with his absence. He is allergic to praise. Praise brings the presence of God.

In our backyard, I put a certain kind of a birdhouse up that somebody told me how to put up. It was to attract a certain kind of bird—a martin, I believe they call it. It's an amazing thing. If you build that birdhouse a certain way, and stick it up there after a while, Paul you know all about this. Paul's a naturalist. You build that birdhouse a certain way, and those birds will come. I tell you what, when we as a people begin to praise the Lord, it attracts the presence of God. God inhabits the praises of His people.

Let me tell you something else it will do—it will help us to win the lost to Jesus Christ. Did you know that when unsaved people walk in here, they see you praising, not just putting on a performance, not just the choir up here showing how good they can sing, not just us singing, which is fine, but I'm talking about heartfelt praise. You take some man whose wife has been begging him to come to church, "Come to Bellevue," "Come to Bellevue." He finally gets up to go and says, "All right, I'll come. One time." And he comes back there and sits down in the back and looks under his eyebrows at me, and says, "I wonder who that guy is. What's his angle?" Maybe he's seen Elmer Gantry on Saturday nights. Another one of those religious con artists—flim flam, bunch of hypocrites, and so forth. But he gets in here and the choir stands up there with faces shining like the noonday sun, and they begin to sing and you sing out of your heart, bringing praise to God. I want to tell you something. That man's going to look around and he's going to say, "These folks believe that stuff." And before long he'll be believing it too. It's caught as much as it is taught.

Evangelism is in the handshake of the usher. It's in the way that we greet and welcome our guest. It's the way we sing praises to our mighty God. And friend, when we do that, Satan feels so uncomfortable he wants to leave. Praise resists our enemies.

VI. Praise Restores Our Peace

Next, number six, praise restores our peace. Are you troubled? Jittery? Nervous? Listen to this. Verse 12, "Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates—that is, He has put us in safely—he hath blessed thy children within thee—that is all those that we love—He maketh peace in thy borders,

and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.”

God, when we praise, shuts the enemy out. He shuts His people in and He gives them everything that they need on the inside this citadel of praise. Great peace have they that love the Lord God. When we praise Him, He puts a line of defense around His people. He will protect your peace when you praise. Praise and peace are inextricably interwoven. I love that word inextricably. It’s a good word. You can’t get them apart—praise and peace. They just link together.

VII. Praise Remembers Our Dependence

Now here’s the last thing. Praise remembers our dependence. When a person sees just how dependant they are upon God, then they want to praise Him because praise Him dynamically into action as we’ve said. Look now in the last few verses, 15 through 20, “He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow.” He’s talking about springtime here. “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.”

You know what he’s saying here? We have been so blessed. We have been so blessed as a nation. No nation has been like Israel, so blessed of the Lord. Oh how we ought to be dependant upon Him. That’s what the Jews were saying. Well you say, “I’m not a Jew.” No, but you’re His people. Look in Acts chapter 15, verse 14, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”

Just as Israel was a called people, the Church is a called people. And we need to remember at Bellevue Baptist church, individually and corporately, how dependant we are upon God. Do you know the fact that we don’t praise is bad enough, but what it indicates is even worse—our self-dependency. Rather than depending on God.

Conclusion

Now what’s the conclusion? I’m finished. Let me tell you what my conclusion is. Praise needs to be the permanent pattern of my heart. And of yours. I often love this Psalm, and I quote it many times, Psalm 34:1—“I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall be continually in my mouth.” Isn’t that great? People ask me if I’ll autograph or sign something. That’s the verse I’ll put down. “I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” I find myself just driving down the road saying, “Jesus, I love You,” “God, I praise You,” “I bless You.” Praise the Lord! Just continually.

Let His praise be in your mouth.

Here's another one. Psalm 57 and verse 7. Listen to it, "My heart is fixed on God. My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise." You know what the Psalmist is saying? "I've made up my mind. My heart is fixed. I'm not willy nilly about it. I will sing and praise God." Wouldn't you like to say that to the Lord? Would you bow your heads right now, and would you, as an individual, just say, "Lord, I want to fix my heart right now to praise You. I want to take these verses and make them mine. My heart is fixed, O God. My heart is fixed." And then would you say, "Lord, as a result, Thy praise shall be continually in my mouth. Lord I'm going to cast off the spirit of heaviness and I'm going to put on the garment of praise and let praise change my life."

The Power of Praise

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: October 18, 1998

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 147

“Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

PSALMS 147:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. Praise Reverences Our God
- II. Praise Refreshes Our Spirit
- III. Praise Releases Our Faith
- IV. Praise Reflects Our Faithfulness
- V. Praise Resists Our Enemies
- VI. Praise Restores Our Peace
- VII. Praise Renews Our Dependence on God

Conclusion

Introduction

Be finding Psalm 147, if you would please. And, just to conclude the service tonight, we're going to talk about "The Power of Praise." We sing a little chorus: "It's amazing what praising can do," and I want us to think one more time, as we have praised the Lord in song tonight, just why we do it. Not only should we praise Him in song—we praise Him in prayer, we praise Him in our offerings, we praise Him in so many ways. Folks, I want to tell you there's more emphasis in the Bible—listen to me—there is more emphasis in the Bible on praise than there is on prayer. And, there are some very powerful and practical lessons on praise that we're going to learn from Psalm 147. I want to mention some things that praise will do.

I. Praise Reverences Our God

Number one: It is praise that reverences our God. Look, if you will please, in verse 1: *“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”* (Psalms 147:1) We've proven that tonight, have we not? You see, listen, folks, God created the entire universe. God made everything in it to praise Him. Everything that lives and moves is to be giving praise to God. It is to be one grand

chorus of praise to the Almighty.

Listen to Psalms 145 and verse 10 in the very neighborhood where we are: *“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.”* (Psalms 145:10) 'Tis not just the saints, but everything that God has created. And, when we get to heaven, we're to praise the Lord. Look, if you will, in Psalms 148 and verses 1 through 5: *“Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him [from] the heights. Praise...him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise [ye] him, all [the] stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.”* (Psalms 148:1–5) That is, everything that God has made, praise Him—give Him glory.

When you get to heaven, you're going to see the angels there. And, what will the angels and the created beings in eternity be doing? They'll be praising the Lord. Revelation 4, verse 8: *“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”* (Revelation 4:8) You see, profanity degrades God. Never, never, never, never take God's name in vain. And, as profanity degrades God, praise exalts God. And, He is worthy of our praise. As a matter of fact, the word *worship* and the word *worth-ship* are related. So, what does praise do? Well, praise, friend, reverences our God.

II. Praise Refreshes Our Spirit

Number two—here's the second thing praise does: not only does it reverence our God (verse 1), but praise refreshes our spirit (verses 2 and 3). Now look, if you will, here in verse 2—we're in Psalm 147—and the Bible says, *“The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”* (Psalms 147:2–3) If you have a broken heart, you need to learn how to praise the Lord, because this is a psalm of praise. And, praise is the highest function of the human spirit. There's nothing you can do—not study; not music, in the secular sense—nothing you can do that will so encourage your spirit as praising the Lord.

You know, I've been looking in bookstores lately, and it's amazing how many bookstores are dealing with books that deal with mental sickness among Christians: depression, and anger, and fear. There are so many books that deal with these things. You would think that we're just like everybody else—that Christians have the same kind of neurosis and mental problems that other people have. Now, true, there are some clinical illnesses, but no Christian need be depressed in spirit. We don't have to—we don't have to—go around with a broken spirit. And, so many of our mental hospitals, and institutions, and psychologists, and psychiatrists, and counselors—many of them

would almost have to close up shop if Christians would learn how to praise.

Do you know what the problem of many people is? They're so self-centered. They are ego-centered. You cannot praise God and be ego-centered. When you become ego-centered, let me tell you what happens. When you become preoccupied with yourself, you become self-centered. And, when you become self-centered, it follows as night follows day that you're going to become defensive. And then, when you become defensive, you're going to become hostile. And then, when you become hostile, you're going to become aggressive, and you're going to be a problem for yourself and a problem for others. To be self-centered is self-destructive. Jesus Christ said in Luke chapter 9, verse 24: *"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever [shall] lose his life for my sake [and the gospel's], the same shall save it."* (Luke 9:24) What Jesus is saying is self-centeredness is destructive.

But listen, you cannot praise God—listen—you cannot praise God without relinquishing that self-centeredness. Egotism and praise don't exist in the same heart. And, when the lovely God is the center of your attention—when Almighty God is the center of your attention—rather than being preoccupied with bankrupt self, then you find your spirit is just refreshed and renewed. You cannot praise God and complain at the same time. Praise and bitterness don't exist in the same heart. Praise and irritation don't exist in the same heart. So, praise reverences our God; praise refreshes our spirit. Look at it again in Psalms 147 and verse 3: *"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."* (Psalms 147:3)

III. Praise Releases Our Faith

I'll tell you what else praise does: praise releases our faith. If you're having trouble with faith, begin to praise God. Now, why does—why does—praise release faith? Because faith focuses on the greatness of God. If you're having difficulty with faith, it's because you've not seen the greatness of God. Look, if you will, in verses 4 through 6 of this psalm. We're in Psalm 147. It speaks of God; it says, *"He telleth the number of the stars"*—now, a teller is somebody who counts things, so it says here He counts the number of the stars—*"he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground."* (Psalms 147:4–6)

Now, what the psalmist is doing is just thinking of the greatness of God, and it says, first of all, He tells the stars; He numbers the stars. Have you ever thought about that? There are one hundred billion stars in our galaxy, and there are one hundred million galaxies in known space. And, the philosophers and astronomers tell us that's only one billionth of theoretical space. And, think of the billions upon billions upon billions upon billions of stars, and God counts them every one. There's not a speck of dust in the

created universe that ever has been that the Almighty God does not know. Not only does He number them; He names them. He's got a name for every star in the universe. Sometimes I can't remember the names of my grandchildren. He remembers all of this.

Do you know what praise is? Praise is a form of faith. *Praise is just faith turned inside out.* And, when you pray, if you will pray with praise, you'll find your prayer taking on great power. Jesus taught us to pray that model prayer. And, how does it begin? It begins with prayer: *"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."* (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2) How does it end? It begins with praise. How does it end? It ends with praise: *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."* (Matthew 6:13) And so, when you pray, praise, and you're going to find out that you're going to be praying with more faith.

IV. Praise Reflects Our Faithfulness

Now, what does it do? It reverences our God. It refreshes our spirit. It releases our faith, and praise reflects our thankfulness. Look now in verses 7 through 9: *"Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry."* (Psalms 147:7–9)

When Joyce and I pulled out of the house to come to church tonight, it was raining. And, she thought—she said, "Oh, look, it's raining," and she just had a word of gratefulness and thankfulness for the rain. Don't ever complain about the rain. If you didn't have rain, you wouldn't have crops. If you didn't have crops, you wouldn't be able to eat. But, what we do is just simply thank God for everything that He has done for us. And, so many times we fail to be grateful for what we have because of what we do not have.

I had a couple come to me. They were crying; they were in anguish. A fine couple—he looked to me to be twenty-six; she looked to be about twenty-three. He was handsome; she was beautiful. They had a little baby. And, they needed to talk to me, and I wondered, "What can be their problem?" And, I said, "Well, well, tell me, what is the problem?" He said, "We just don't have anything. We don't have a job. We don't have any money. We don't have this, and we don't have that." And, they were just so broken, and I said, "Now, wait a minute—wait a minute. Don't say that you don't have anything." I said, "The little baby that you've got—did God give you that baby?" "Yes." "Do you love that baby?" "Yes." "Would you sell that baby for a hundred dollars?" "No." "Would you sell that baby for a thousand?" "No." "Would you sell that baby for a million?" "Absolutely not." I said, "Well, then you're wealthy—you're wealthy. You've got that little baby." I said, "I want to ask you a question, sir: What's your health like?" He

said, “Well, as far as I know, it’s fine.” I said to her—I said, “What’s your health like?” “Fine.” I said, “Did you know that there are billionaires who would give every cent they own just to have the health that you have, just to have the body—I mean, would give every penny they own just to have your health?” I said, “What nation do you live in?” They said, “Well, we’re Americans.” I said, “Well, you’re an American?” He said, “That’s right. We’re Americans.” I said, “Well, isn’t that wonderful?” I said, “Did you know that there are people leaving country and leaving father, and mother, and lands, and everything they have just to come to this country? They leave it all just so they can come and live here, and you already live here and you’re complaining.” I said, “Listen—listen—look how blessed you are. You’re young. You’re healthy. You’ve got a baby. You love one another. You’re an American citizen.”

You know, so many times we fail to see what we do have because we just think sometimes about what we don’t have. Friend, thank God for the blessings that He has given you. There’s not a person here—I don’t care who you are—that does not have a blessing. And, I’d rather appreciate the things that I don’t have than to have things I don’t appreciate. And, if you’re not grateful for what God has given you, you ought to be grateful for what you have escaped. Friend, listen, God is a good God. And, what praise does—praise just reflects our thankfulness. Look at it again here in Psalms 147, verse 7: *“Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.”* (Psalms 147:7)

V. Praise Resists Our Enemies

I’ll tell you what else praise does: not only does praise reflect our thanksgiving, but praise resists our enemies, our foes. When we begin to praise the Lord, the devil hightails it out. Look, if you will, in verses 10 and 11 of this same psalm here. It’s speaking of praise. Psalm 147—look in verse 10: it says, *“[God] delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.”* (Psalms 147:10–11) Now, what is that talking about? Well, it’s saying that God doesn’t put any faith in military might. That’s the horse—the strength of the horse. Or, in marching armies—that’s the legs of a man. Those are not the things that cause God delight. God takes delight in those that fear Him and those that praise Him. God’s armies are in the skies.

I was reading this afternoon about Jehoshaphat—2 Chronicles chapter 20, where God allowed some enemies to come against Jehoshaphat. And, the enemies of the Ammonites, and the Moabites and others, and some from Mount Seir—they came against Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat didn’t know what to do. And, he’s looking for some answer from the Lord. And, you might want to turn to it here in 2 Chronicles chapter 20 and the last part of verse 14: in the midst of all of this conflict, *“a Levite of the*

sons of Asaph—“came upon this Levite”—“*the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation: And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s*”—that’s one of the great verses in all of the Bible; that’s in 2 Chronicles chapter 20 and verse 15. And then, here’s the command that this Levite gave, this son of Asaph. They were the singers. Listen—“*To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. [And] ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah*”—and the name *Judah* means “praise”—“*and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed: to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD*”—listen to this—“*worshipping the LORD. And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high*”—sometimes people tell me that the music is too loud. Sometimes I think it’s not loud enough for our great God—“*And...rose early in the morning, and [they] went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and...they [stood] forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, [and] so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD...that [they] should*”—here’s another great verse—“*that [they] should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army...to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.*” (2 Chronicles 20:14–22) I could read the rest of the story, but folks, I’m telling you, suppose we got in trouble in the United States—in some great battle—and our Commander in Chief said, “All right, let’s get an army of singers to go march against the enemy, just praising the Lord.” Everybody would say that he was crazy, insane—that it wouldn’t work. But, that’s what happened. And, as they began to praise the Lord, the enemy scattered.

Do you know that God is present everywhere? God is omnipresent. God is present even in hell. There’s no place where God is not. God is a circle whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere. But, God is dynamically present when we praise—dynamically present. He occupies the praise of His people. (Psalm 22:3) And, since God is present when there is massive praise, glorious praise, overflowing praise, Satan is allergic to that. Satan... The way to drive Satan out of a congregation, out of a place, out of a building—anywhere—out of a problem is just to begin to praise

the Lord. Praise resists our enemies.

Now, you say, “Well, Pastor Rogers. As soon as God deals with my problem, I’ll praise Him.” No, you begin to praise Him before He deals with your problem. And, you’re going to find out that your foes are going to take flight when you praise the Lord.

VI. Praise Restores Our Peace

I’ll tell you something else praise does: not only does it resist our enemies; it restores our peace. If you have...if you are filled with fear and problems, look, if you will now, in Psalm 147 and verses 12 through 14: *“Praise [ye] the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of...wheat.”* (Psalms 147:12–14) You see, praise just helps us to remember that God has put a line of defense all the way around us; He has just hemmed us in. And, He is the One who will protect our peace when we praise Him.

VII. Praise Renews Our Dependence on God

And, the next thing I want you to notice is that praise—and finally, what praise does—it just renews our dependence upon God. If we’re not praising the Lord, it’s because we’re not depending upon Him. But, when we depend upon Him, we praise Him. Begin now in verse 14 through the end of the psalm: *“He maketh peace [within] thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of...wheat. He sendeth forth his commandment upon [the] earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt...with any”—“He hath not dealt so with any”—“nation...as for his judgments, they have not know them. Praise ye the LORD.”* (Psalms 147:14–20)

What the psalmist is saying is we’re a special people. He sends—He sends—the springtime. He sends the summer. He sends the winter. He sends the seasons. And, He just protects His people who are dependent upon Him. Well, you say, “That was talking to Israel so long ago. We’re not Israel.” No, we’re not, but the Bible tells us in Acts chapter 15, verse 14 how God *“at...first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”* (Acts 15:14) So, we are a people for His name. And, our Lord is round about His Church—He’s round about Bellevue—just as the Lord was round about His ancient people so long ago.

Conclusion

Now, I just want to close the message tonight by telling you that you ought to make up

your mind that praise is going to be a permanent part of your life. So many times, when somebody asks me if I would personalize a Bible for them, I sign my name and then I write, "Psalm 34 and verse 1." And, here's what it says: *"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."* (Psalms 34:1) And, Psalm 57 and verse 7: *"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing"—"I will sing"—"and give praise."* (Psalms 57:7) Why don't you just say, "I've made up my mind my life is going to be a life of praise"?

Father, just cause us—teach us, Lord—to praise the Lord with all of our heart. Make me, dear Lord, one instrument of praise. And, may your praise continually be in my mouth, and may it, Lord, be an encouragement to others. For I pray in your name. Amen.

It's Amazing What Praising Can Do

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 25, 1984

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 147:1–13

“Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

PSALMS 147:13

Outline

Introduction

- I. Praise Reverences God
- II. Praise Refreshes the Saints
- III. Praise Releases Our Faith
- IV. Praise Reflects Our Thankfulness
- V. Praise Resists Our Enemy

Conclusion

Introduction

It is amazing what praising can do. And I'd like for you to turn please to Psalm 147. Psalm 147 begins with a command, not a suggestion, not a request, but indeed an exhortation that should be taken as a divine direction for every blood-bought child of God. It says, *“Praise ye the Lord.”* Just turn to it and let's look at it. We're going to read the first two verses here of Psalm 147 under the title, “It's Amazing What Praising Can Do.”

“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.” Now the idea of the word *comely* here is that praise is always appropriate. It always fits in any situation. *“The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He*

delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion” (Psalm 147:1–12).

I'm going to stop right there and I'm going to say something that may surprise you; but it is a fact. The Bible puts more emphasis upon praise than it does upon prayer. Now we all know the importance of prayer. As a matter of fact, prayer is the life and breath of the Christian. But if we take prayer to mean that we are asking things from God, petitioning things from God—and that's literally what the word *prayer* means: to ask and to receive things from God—then we add to that, praise, which is a form of worship. And the Bible, God's Holy Word, has more emphasis, I say, more emphasis on praise than any other subject that I can find in the Bible.

I want to give you some very powerful and some very practical reasons for learning to praise the Lord. By the way, one of the things that has transformed my life, one of the things that keeps me going—if I have any spiritual secrets, not that I'm holding myself up for an example, but comparing me with me—the thing that keeps me going is learning how to praise the Lord.

I. Praise Reverences God

Now I want to give you some reasons why you ought to praise the Lord. First of all, praise reverences God. Praise gives reverence to God. Look again, if you will, in verse 1: *“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely”* (Psalm 147:1). Now what that means is this: God created us not primarily to serve Him. I mean, if He wanted something to serve Him, He could make machines to serve Him; He could get angels, who would do a better job of serving Him. But God created everything, living and nonliving, to be one great, great chorus of praise.

You're in Psalm 147, just turn backward to Psalm 145, and look in verse 10. You might want to mark that. Psalm 145, verse 10: *“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee”* (Psalm 145:10). That means that everything that God has created should praise Him. Angels should praise Him. Human beings should praise Him. The animal creatures praise the Lord. Even the inanimate objects praise the Lord. This great universe praises the Lord. Over in the book of the Revelation there are four creatures, four *zoa* that represent all of creation. You read about them in Revelation chapter 4, verse 8: *“And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come”* (Revelation 4:8). That's what they are doing in Heaven, folks. They are praising the Lord in Heaven. Amen! Praise His dear name!

You see, when a man curses and uses profanity, he degrades God. When a man

praises, he exalts God. Did you know what the opposite of profanity is? It is praise. Now we get upset when we hear God's name taken in vain. I want to ask you how many times do you take it in praise? How many times do you really learn to praise the Lord? Do you know you'll praise the Lord in direct proportion to what you think of Him? Our word *worship* is really related to the word *worth*. Worship is an indication of our *worth-ship*—how much we think He's worth. He is worthy of our praise. And so praise reverences the Lord.

II. Praise Refreshes the Saints

The second thing praise does: it refreshes the saints. Sometimes I get tired. I've told you before, I don't get tired *of* the work, but sometimes, I get tired *in* the work. And to be honest, you know, sometimes, on Sunday night, when I go home, I'm just emptied out. I really am. But to praise the Lord before I come into this pulpit...—and I just do that before I walk out, almost instinctively, I suppose probably without fail. There are two things I'll do. One is, I will say, “Lord, I'm consciously claiming Your power.” And number two: “Lord, I give You praise. I praise You. I worship You.” And I found out that the joy of the Lord is my strength. And as I begin to praise the Lord, He begins to refresh.

Look, if you will, in verses 2 and 3 and see what I'm talking about: “*The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds*” (Psalm 147:2–3). Now folks, there is a refreshment, there is a healing, there is a binding up of the wounds, that comes when we praise. What a marvelous therapy that is.

Did you know what distinguishes you from the animals? The animals don't have a spirit. When the animals praise God, they praise God unconsciously, because no animal ever worships. When the flowers and the beasts and so forth praise, we are only using that symbolically to mean that all the universe is in harmony with God. But man, along with the angels, can only consciously praise God, because man has a spirit and animals don't have a spirit. The spirit in man is the organ of praise. That's what a spirit is. Do you know why you have a human spirit? It is the organ of spiritual knowledge and the organ of spiritual praise.

In recent years, I've been reading a lot, and hearing a lot, about mental health among Christians. And if you read any of the popular Christian magazines, a great number of the books that are being printed deal with mental health and happiness on the part of the saints. I believe that if Christians would learn how to praise God, they would be healed. I'm not talking about a physical healing—although that certainly would be an offspring of this—I'm talking about the healing of broken spirits. I believe that many of our hospital beds are occupied by Christians who have mental disorders and nervous disorders, and I believe many of those mental disorders and nervous disorders

are because they have not learned how to praise.

Now even though we have two very fine Christian psychiatrists in our church that I know of, perhaps some others, I'll tell you a good way to help put those two guys out of business. I love them, and they'd be with me, shouting and praising the Lord. They'd be glad to practice in some other form of medicine; I'll guarantee that. But I'll tell you, Christians should learn how to praise the Lord.

Let me tell you why Christians have so many nervous and mental disorders. I'll tell you why. It's because they are self-centered rather than God-centered. You see, when a man is self-centered—that is, his ego is in the center—then he is going to have a warped personality. Rather, be God-centered. God created us to be God-centered. Only a man who is out of fellowship with God is a self-centered man, and when a man puts the emphasis upon self, when a man puts the emphasis upon ego, that man becomes self-centered.

Now watch it. When a man becomes self-centered, then he's going to become defensive, because his God is there on the throne and he's got to defend his God. First, he becomes self-centered, then he becomes defensive, and after he becomes defensive, he then becomes hostile. When he feels that self is being attacked. And then, he may even become aggressive or aggressively hostile, and strike out at other people. And then, other people withdraw from him, which causes him to draw back into himself. And the cycle is repeated over and over, until this individual literally makes himself the center of his own life and he self-destructs.

Jesus said it in Luke chapter 9 and verse 24: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it:”—*that is, whoever becomes self-centered, egocentric, is going to lose it—*“but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it”* (Luke 9:24). You cannot truly praise God without relinquishing this occupation with self. When self becomes a way of life, the life comes apart. When praise becomes a way of life, rather than having self on the throne, the infinite loving God becomes the center of our being. Rather than bankrupt and hideous and ugly self, our lives come together. We cannot praise and pout at the same time. In Isaiah 61, verse 3, God gives us *“the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”* (Isaiah 61:3). All of this is what I'm saying: *“the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* Verse 3: *“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds”* (Psalm 147:3).

III. Praise Releases Our Faith

Praise reverences the Lord. Praise refreshes the saints. Praise releases our faith. Now folks, *“without faith it is impossible to please [God]”* (Hebrews 11:6). Do you know that thing that gives your faith a vitamin shot? It is to praise the Lord. As you begin to praise the Lord, faith just grows, because faith is praise turned inside out.

Notice how this Psalm picks up on this. Notice in verses 4 to 6: *“He telleth the number of the stars;”—that is, He knows everyone of them—“he calleth them all by their names.”* The myriad billions of stars, He has a personal name for every one of these stars. *“Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.”* Therefore, *“The LORD lifteth up the meek...”* (Psalm 147:4–6).

What does that mean? When you get to concentrating on just how great and how magnificent God is that scooped up the seas, and heaped up the mountains, and hung up the moon and the sun, and flung out the stars, and runs this mighty universe, and yet you remember that that God is the God who lifts up the meek—that He loves you, He knows you; not only does He call the stars by name, but the very hairs of your head are numbered—then you are just going to find that faith really growing in your heart and in your life. Friend, I want to tell you that this is our Father's world, and not a blade of grass moves without His permission. Hallelujah! And if you want faith—and you've got to have faith to get your prayers answered, you've got to have faith to live for God—begin to praise God. Faith is the by-product of praise.

IV. Praise Reflects Our Thankfulness

I'll tell you what else praise does. It not only releases our faith, it reflects our thankfulness. I don't suppose there is a greater sin than just the sin of ingratitude. You know, old Shakespeare wrote, *“How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child.”* And we're the children of God. How we ought to thank Him! Look, if you will, in verses 7 to 9: *“Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry”* (Psalm 147:7–9).

Now what is this saying? It is *“God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy”* (1 Timothy 6:17). Joyce and I are just loving this season of the year. I want to tell you something, folks: we've got something up here in Tennessee they don't even have in Florida—that's a springtime. And brother, it is marvelous to behold. It's so exciting to go out every day and to see those buds just busting, their little hearts just opening up and bursting out in beauty, and to see these trees as they are turning now, that minty green; and, before long, they are just going to be in that full splendor. There's just something about this season of the year that—you know—that it's our great God, the God of might, and the God of resurrection, who's doing all of this. Our hearts ought to be bursting with praise.

Sometimes we grumble about how much things cost here in America. Have you ever been guilty of that? Talking about the high prices? A man went to a grocery store with a shopping bag full of money and came home with a billfold full of groceries. You've been

in that situation. Now folks, let me tell you something. I was doing some reading. I found out that in Russia a man has to work an hour to earn enough money to buy a loaf of bread. In America, the average man works 6 minutes to buy a loaf of bread. For a quart of milk in Russia, they work one hour and 11 minutes. In America, to buy a quart of milk the average person works 9 minutes. In Russia, in order to buy a suit of clothes, the Russians must work 583 hours. An American works an average of 38 hours to buy a suit of clothes. A cotton dress in Russia—and it's not much of a dress at that—costs 225 hours. The American can earn it in four hours.

I tell you we're so blessed. We're so blessed. 85% of the people in this world don't have enough to eat, and we throw away enough in our garbage cans almost to feed another nation. And so many of us, rather than being humbly grateful, we're grumbly hateful. We need to learn how to praise the Lord and thank God. And if you can't be thankful for what you receive, you ought to be thankful for what you're not receiving, because many of us deserve the judgment of God. We ought to just praise the Lord, and praise just releases and reflects our thanksgiving.

V. Praise Resists Our Enemy

I'll tell you what else praise does, according to this psalm. Praise resists our enemy. We've got enemies, folks. And if you don't know that you've got enemies, you'd better open your eyes. I'm talking about this church, and I'm talking about every Bible-believing Christian in America, and in the world. It's always been that way; it always will be that way.

But look, if you will, in Psalm 147 and verse 10: *“He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man.”* Well, I can understand that. Looks like two pieces of hemp rope with a knot tied in them. *“The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee”* (Psalm 147:10–13).

Now what are all these verses talking about? Now when he is talking about the legs of a man, he is talking about a man's strength to run and to fight. The strength of a horse is talking about armaments—all these things. He's saying these are not the things that God takes praise in, or that God takes glory in, or that God gets pleasure out of. The thing that is going to protect America is not primarily the Pentagon, not primarily our war machines—although I would not vote to diminish that. The thing that is going to protect America is when we learn how to praise the Lord as a nation. This nation was built on a spiritual foundation.

Bill Bright is a warm, personal friend of mine, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. Back prior to the last election, Bill Bright said...—somebody asked him a

question. He gave the answer instantaneously; the answer was from God. He said, "I don't take credit for the answer, but," he said, "I didn't have to think, when I gave the answer." The question was, "Who will lead America out of the trouble that we are in? Who can we elect?" And Bill Bright said, "There's nobody that we can elect who will lead us out of the trouble that we are in, for we are under the curse of God. But," he said, "if we will repent, and get right with God, a little child can lead us."

I believe that. *I believe that the answer to America's troubles lies not in Washington. And I'm not saying that we ought not to be concerned about who's in Washington, and I'm not saying that we ought not to pray for, and elect the right people. But I'm saying there is no substitute for getting right with God, and there is greater power in the pulpits of America than there ever could be in Washington, D.C.*

It is praise that is going to resist our enemy. You get home and you want to read something that will just set your soul afire, read 2 Chronicles, the 20th chapter, and read there where King Jehoshaphat began to praise the Lord, when the armies of the Moabites and the Ammonites and Mount Seir came against Judah and Jehoshaphat. They prayed and praised and sent forth the singers to praise the Lord, and the Lord sent an ambushment against the enemies of God. Praise destroys the plan of the enemy.

Why is this? Why are our enemies repelled when we praise? Because God is so near when we praise. Do you know what the Bible says in Psalm 22, verse 3? It says that God inhabits the praises of His people. Praise is God's address. Do you want to know where God lives? God lives, God dwells, in the praise of His people. Now I know that God is always omnipresent, but God is dynamically present when God's people praise Him. That's the reason that Satan is allergic to praise. Wherever there is massive praise, wherever there is triumphant praise, Satan is paralyzed, Satan is bound, Satan is vanquished. Satan cannot live in an attitude of praise, and therefore, I want Bellevue Baptist Church forevermore to be a church of great praise.

That's the reason we put such an expenditure into our musical program. We don't believe that is in any way superfluous. We believe that is one of the grandest investments that we can make. I've seen praise turn the devil away so many times. You'd be surprised how many times, on this platform, when I see things take place in this building, that I begin to praise the Lord and bind the power of the enemy through praise and see God bless.

I hardly like to refer to this episode; but many of you remember that day when that door burst open and a young man came into this building, a poor young man, under the influence of wicked spirits. That young man came into this building, and so many of our people were immediately disquieted. And I don't want to rehearse that entire episode; but I remember one thing that just so blessed my heart. After all of it was over—and

Brother Tommy, I know that you remember this well, because you'd led us that Sunday morning in a great hymn of praise—I said, “Tommy, I want us to stand right now, and I want us just to praise the Lord.” And we sang a praise to God, of how great God is: “To God be the glory, to God be the glory.” And I sang it, and you sang it, and we sang it; and the breath of Heaven blew through this place. The power of the enemy was broken and vanquished, and God came down upon His people. And when the invitation was given, from all over this building people came to give their heart to Jesus Christ, and again, that night, and again, the next Sunday, as God's people learned to praise Him. The devil cannot operate, he cannot function, in an attitude and a place of praise. That's what the Psalmist is saying here. It is praise that resists the enemy.

Conclusion

And so listen again. David said, *“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise”* (Psalm 57:7). We just need to praise the Lord. Psalm 34, verse 1. Dr. Robert G. Lee signed my Bible as a young preacher, as he signed many books—and always he would sign what? Psalm 34, verse 1. And what does it say? *“I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth”* (Psalm 34:1).

The Power of Praise

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: January 31, 1988

Main Scripture Text: Psalms 147:1–14

“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.”

PSALMS 147:1

Outline

Introduction

- I. Praise Glorifies Our God
- II. Praise Heals Our Hurts
- III. Praise Fortifies Our Faith
- IV. Praise Tells Our Thanksgiving
- V. Praise Protects Our Peace

Conclusion

Introduction

Psalm 147 is going to be our communion meditation tonight—Psalm 147. We’re going to think tonight on “The Power of Praise.” Psalm 147 begins with a command. When you find the psalm, look up here, and let me tell you this: that this psalm begins with a command to praise the Lord, and it simply says, *“Praise ye the LORD.”* (Psalms 147:1) Now, that’s more than a suggestion. It is more than a request. It is more than an admonition. It is, indeed, a command. And, I’m going to tell you something very interesting: there is more emphasis in the Bible on praise than there is on prayer. Now, if you don’t believe that, you get your Bible down and study it. Now, why is this? I want to give you, tonight, some very practical and very powerful reasons for learning to praise the Lord, and I’m going to give you four or five very, very practical, but wonderful, wonderful, reasons for learning to praise the Lord. And, if you’ll do it, I’ll just guarantee it will change your life—just guarantee it.

I. Praise Glorifies Our God

All right, number one: Praise glorifies God. Read verse 1: *“Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant”*—now, watch this—*“and praise is comely.”* (Psalms 147:1) What that literally means is that praise is appropriate; it is the appropriate thing to praise God. If you’ll study the created universe, you’ll find out that

everything that God has created has been created to bring Him glory.

I was looking tonight in Psalms 145:10, and it says, *“All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.”* And then, I looked at the psalm immediately following our psalm tonight, 147. Look in Psalm 148, beginning in verse 1: *“Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise...him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise...him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.”* (Psalms 148:1–5) The entire universe of things, living and non-living, is to be one great, grand chorus and paean of praise to our great God. Do you know what the highest occupation of the angels is? It is praising God.

Now, why does praise glorify God? Well, the very word *praise*, or the very word *worship*, comes from an Old English “worth-ship.” The way you praise God tells me what you think of God. Very frankly, the way you praise God tells me what God is worth to you; it tells God what He is worth to you. Praise glorifies God. He is worthy of our praise.

Have you ever heard a person—well, surely you have—use profanity? Doesn’t that just—doesn’t that just—rip your heart out? Have you? It grieves me—it grieves me—to hear people use profanity, and I’ll tell you why: because profanity degrades God. Sometimes a person will curse, and you remonstrate with them about it; and they say, “Well, I didn’t mean anything by it.” I say, “Well, that makes it doubly worse—that you could take the name of the thrice holy God of Israel and not mean anything by it.” You see, profanity degrades God; praise glorifies God. That’s the first reason: praise glorifies our God.

II. Praise Heals Our Hurts

Second reason: Not only does praise glorify our God, but praise heals our hurts. Continue to read in verse 2: *“The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel”*—that is, those who are broken, and wounded, and bruised, and bleeding. He just puts His arms around them—*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”* (Psalms 147:2–3)

Now, let me tell you what God gave to you: God gave you a body, a soul, and a spirit. Each one has a function. Now, the function of the body is obvious: the body is the spacesuit we wear so we can live on Planet Earth and we can express ourselves. The soul is the mind, the emotion, and the will that lives inside of this body that motivates this body, that drives this body and gives it direction. Now, the spirit is the organ of praise created to praise God, to know God, to reverence God. You are body, soul, and spirit.

Now, this afternoon I was sitting in my recliner chair, and I had preached three times this morning and made a visit this afternoon. And, I got in that chair, and, frankly, it felt good and my body liked it. Now, when it was time to go to church, my body said, “I want to stay in this chair.” That’s what my body said. Now, my soul said, “I want to watch the Super Bowl”—honest confession. I mean, really, there’s something in me that wants to see that game. Now folks, you’d rather me be carnal and truthful than to be spiritual and a liar, wouldn’t you? I mean, my soul said it: “I want to see that football game.” But folks, my spirit said, “I want to go to church and worship God.” Now, the spirit is the organ of praise, and my spirit said to soul, “Soul, we’re going to my church.” And, my soul said to my body, “Get up!” And, that’s the way it ought to be.

There’s a chain of command. Now, when a man is overridden by his soul, he’s carnal. When he’s overridden by his body, he’s not worth shooting. But, when he’s... And, some are—some are actually slaves to their body. But, my dear friend, the spirit is to have control. Now listen, the function of your spirit is to praise. That’s the function of your spirit. And, dear friend, the highest function that the human spirit can attain is to praise God. That’s why God created you.

Now, I said that praise heals our hurts. Did you know that we have a lot of Christians in mental institutions? We have Christians—some of them taking tranquilizers like salted peanuts. They have mental and nervous disorders. Now, sometimes there are reasons for that, and nobody is to be blamed for it. There, indeed, are chemical imbalances. There are physiological reasons. And, I want to tell you something, friend: proper praise could almost put some psychiatrists out of business. I’m telling you the truth. A lot of our mental and nervous disorders would disappear if we learned how to praise.

And, why is that? Why does praise not only glorify God, but why does praise heal our hurts? *“He healeth the broken in heart”*—verse 3 says—*“and [He] bindeth up their wounds.”* (Psalms 147:3) Why? Well, I’ll tell you what carnality is and what most of our mental disorders are caused by: it is an over-occupation with our personal egos. We get self-centered. And, when one gets extremely self-centered, do you know what happens? Do you know what the next step of being extremely self-centered is? It’s to be defensive. A self-centered person is always a defensive person; he’s always defending himself. And, do you know what happens when a person gets overly defensive? He becomes hostile. In order to defend himself, he feels like he has to be hostile toward you. And, do you know what happens when a person gets hostile? He becomes aggressive. You see, anybody who is self-centered rather than God-centered is self-destructive.

Let me give you a verse in the New Testament. In Luke 9:24, Jesus said, *“Whosoever [shall] save his life shall lose it: but whosoever [shall] lose his life for my sake [and the gospel’s], the same shall save it.”* You want to save your life, your soul,

your *psyche* (literally what that means)? Well, dear friend, just lose it then. Give yourself to God in praise, and you're going to find out that, rather than being self-centered and defensive and hostile and aggressive, that the spiritual juices are going to begin to flow in your heart. You see, you cannot—you cannot—genuinely praise God without relinquishing that self-centeredness. There's no way that you can do it. When praise becomes a way of life, the infinitely lovely God becomes the center of your self—the center of your being—rather than your bankrupt self.

There is nothing so empty as a self-centered life. There is nothing so centered as a self-emptied life. And, we need to learn to praise God. It just heals our hearts. You can't praise and sulk at the same time. Praise and irritation cannot coexist. Praise and pride cannot live together. Let me give you a verse of Scripture—Isaiah 61:3: the Bible says that God has given us *“the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* And, you want to cast off that spirit of heaviness? Put on the garment of praise. What does praise do? Number one: It glorifies God. Number two—what does praise do? Friend, it will do more for you than any psychiatrist or psychologist can do for you. I'm not against these people. We have some lovely people in our church who do a wonderful job helping people. But, thank God, they, too, would say, “Pastor, praise—praise—is a marvelous, wonderful tool for healing the human spirit.”

III. Praise Fortifies Our Faith

I'll tell you a third thing that praise does: not only does praise glorify God, not only does praise heal our hurts, but praise fortifies our faith. Now, without faith it is impossible to please God. Look in verse 4 of this same psalm—it speaks of God: *“He telleth the number of the stars”*—have you ever thought about how many billions and quadrillions of stars are out there? Innumerable stars. God knows every one of them—*“he [calls] them all by their names”*—did you know that every star in this stellar universe has a name? Every one of them. And, God says, “That one's this one, and that one's this one, and that one's that one.” He knows the stars by their names. And then, the psalmist says—*“Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the meek: [and] he casteth the wicked down to the ground.”* (Psalms 147:4–6)

Now, what does praise do? Praise reminds you one more time, dear friend, that this is my Father's world. I mean, the God that runs this universe is my personal Heavenly Father. And, not a blade of grass moves without His permission. Not a speck of dust blows around without His permission. You see, praise is a form of faith. Praise is worry turned inside out. It's just simply a way of saying, “God is over all, and no matter what my problem is, God is greater.” And, the psalmist here speaks of the greatness of God and tells how He handles this mighty universe. And friend, if He can number the stars, He can take care of your problems—He can. Praise glorifies God—it glorifies our God. It

heals our hurts. It fortifies our faith.

IV. Praise Tells Our Thanksgiving

I'll tell you something else it does: it tells our thanksgiving. You can tell a thankful man by the way he praises. Listen to Psalms 147:7: *"Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh [the] grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry."* (Psalms 147:7–9) Oh, how good God is!

Now, how can you tell me that you are thankful to God and you don't praise God? I think the meanest thing on this earth is an unthankful man. Oh, we think we have things to complain about. I heard about a man who went to the grocery store with a shopping bag full of money and came home with a billfold full of groceries. Maybe you can identify with that. But, before you complain too much, you just think how God has blessed America. And, do you know why God has blessed America? Not because Americans are bigger, smarter; not because our land is more fertile; not because it rains more in America. Do you know that the blessings that are here in America follow the Christian—Judeo-Christian—ethic that we have here?

I was reading a while back that in Russia a man has to work one hour to earn a loaf of bread. Do you know how long a man has to work in America—the average, now; these are all averages—do you know how long a man has to work in America to earn a loaf of bread? Six minutes. A Russian works one hour and eleven minutes for a quart of milk. An American works nine minutes for a quart of milk. For a suit of clothes, a Russian must work five hundred and eighty-three hours to get one suit of clothes. An American—thirty-eight hours for a fine suit of clothes. A cotton dress in America—two hundred and twenty-five... A cotton dress in Russia—you'd work two hundred and twenty-five hours. In America, you work four hours for that dress. Eighty-five percent of the people in the world don't have enough to eat. Most Americans have bread enough and to spare.

"Well," you say, "I don't have everything I need." That's not the important thing, dear friend. Do you appreciate what you do have? I'd rather appreciate the things I don't have than to have the things I don't appreciate. Thank God for His goodness to us. God is good. And friend, if you can't be thankful for what you've received, be thankful for what you've escaped. Thank God you don't get what you deserve. I'm telling you that God is good. And, I'll see not only your attitude of your worth of God, but the thankful spirit that you have by the way you praise. Praise glorifies our God. Praise heals our hurts. Praise tells our thanks.

V. Praise Protects Our Peace

I'll tell you what else praise does: praise protects our peace. Let's continue to read here now, beginning in verse 10, and see what praise does: the Bible says, "*He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man*"—boy, I can understand that! Never mind—"*The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders.*" (Psalms 147:10–14) Praise protects our peace.

Now, when he talks about horses and the legs of a man, what he's saying is that God is not impressed with our armaments. Star Wars or whatever else is not going to protect America. As I've said before, America's biggest threat is God, and their only hope is God. We'd better learn that. I mean, without God we're going down. You can see in the Bible over and over again where people would praise the Lord and God would give them peace. When this nation begins to praise God, God's going to give us peace within our borders.

I've referred many times to that marvelous story over there in 2 Chronicles, the fifteenth chapter—the twentieth chapter. You will remember there—and we won't turn to it tonight—but the armies of the Moabites and the Ammonites in Mount Seir had come against Judah and Jerusalem. And, you will remember that King Jehoshaphat said, "God, what shall we do?" And, God said, "You begin to praise. You get your army, and you put the praises out there. You send the troops into the battle praising the Lord." And, the Bible says when Judah—and the word *Judah* means "praise"—when they began to praise that God sent an ambushment against the enemies of God. (2 Chronicles 20:22)

Now, why is praise so effective? I mean, why did God do this thing over there in 2 Chronicles chapter 20? I'll tell you why: Judah was the messianic tribe. That is, Jesus is to be a descendant of the tribe of Judah. He is "*the Lion of the tribe of Judah.*" (Revelation 5:5) And, Satan had inspired and motivated this confederacy of nations to destroy Judah through whom the Savior was to come. And so, when we know the will of God, when we see the plan of God, when we begin to praise the works of God, God moves in. If you're ever up against the devil, learn to praise, and I'll tell you why: because God inhabits the praise of His people. Psalms 22:3: "*thou...O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*" Do you want to know what God's address is? Where does God live? It's praise; that's where God lives. Now, you say, "Well, God is always present, isn't He?" Oh, yes, He is omnipresent, but He is dynamically present when people praise. And, just as God moves into praise, Satan is allergic to praise. Wherever there is massive, triumphant praise, Satan is paralyzed, Satan is bound, and Satan is banished.

Conclusion

Now, I want to suggest, dear friend, that these are five wonderful reasons we ought to praise the Lord: because praise glorifies our God; praise heals our hurts; praise fortifies our faith; praise tells our thanks, and praise protects our peace. Now, before we have the Lord's Supper, let me tell you this: that praise needs not to be something that you do once in a while; praise needs to be the permanent pattern of your heart. Psalms 57:7 says, *"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise."* Don't praise just simply by emotion, by whim. Just say, "I've made up my mind. My heart is fixed. I'll do it." We praise by principle and not by impulse. We praise no matter what happens. Psalms 34:1: *"I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."*